Beware the Glitter Of a Golden Era

OPINION

Charles Krauthammer

WHAT DOES it mean when the major item in the president's end-of-year news conference is a puppy-naming? It means we should be wistful at the passing of 1997. We may never see another year like it. When a chocolate Lab leads the news, we know times are good.

How good? Look at the numbers. Unemployment is at its lowest in two decades. Inflation hovers at 2 percent, early 1960s' numbers. That is not supposed to happen. We have been bred on the axiom that unemployment and inflation are mutually contradictory, that when one form of social misery declines, the other must rise. Well, not anymore.

The economy is growing at more than 3 percent. Hourly wages are up 4 percent. Factories are producing at that perfect knife-edge of near capacity but not quite so much as to create industrial bottlenecks (and thus shortages and inflation).

Even more amazing are the indices of social pathology, which we once assumed must inexorably get worse. They have reversed course. Crime is down, dramatically. Rape, for example, is down 45 percent since 1993; murder about 30 percent. In New York City, the crime rate has not been this low in 30 years. The unlivable has become livable again.

Welfare rolls are down, too. After just 12 months of welfare reform (August 1996-July 1997), one in every six welfare recipients has gone off the dole. That is almost 2 million people. In places with aggressive anti-welfare programs like Wisconsin, rolls have been cut by a third. Even such recalcitrant indices as abortion are down.

Nor are the good times just economic and social. Geopolitically, we are enjoying the fruits of victory in the Cold War. At no time in the last 500 years has the gap in power between the No. 1 nation and its nearest rival been as great as it is today. While the critics had conceded America's military and cultural hegemony — a carrier in every ocean, a Big Mac in every pot — they had long clung to the idea of American economic decline.

And look what happened. We are now riding a productivity and growth spurt that has left the rest of the world in our dust. Europe lives with double-digit unemployment and almost total economic stagnation. Asia, the rising tiger, is now in the throes of a collapse so great that its ripples, ironically, constitute the one major threat to our current prosperity.

Now the puzzle: If this is a golden age, why doesn't it feel like a golden age? I recently told an assembly at my son's high school that they were living through a time so blessed they would tell their grandchildren about it. They looked at me uncomprehendingly. First, because they have known little else but good times. And second, because it is hard for anyone to apprehend the sheer felicity of one's own time until it is gone.

But I suspect there is a third reason: We live in gold — but without glory. We associate golden ages with heroic times like that of Pericles. Our triumphs, in contrast, are of the domestic variety. This is the age of Seinfeld, life in miniature. No great battles, no great art, no great triumphs. We know these are diminished times when our most recent military hero is a pilot who, shot down by ragtag Serbs, manages to survive by hiding in the forests of Bosnia like a "scared little bunny rabbit" (his words: Scott O'Grady's heroism is his honesty).

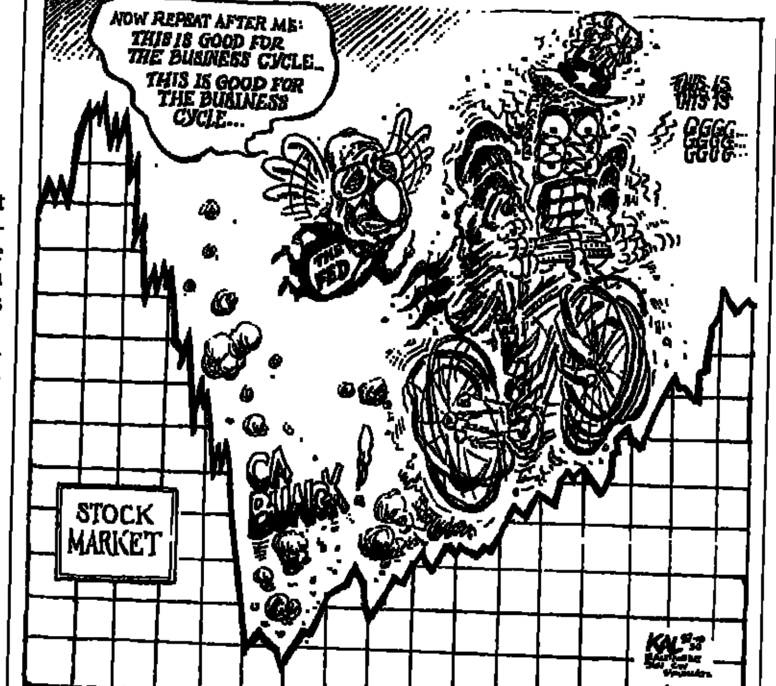
No matter. Who needs wars? Who needs heroes? Who needs glory? These things are not sought; they are thrust upon a nation, unwillingly. Britain's finest hour was 1940. Would you choose for your child to live in London during the Blitz, or in Lansing under Clinton?

By any historical standard, life has never been so good. Why, the news has gotten so absurdly good we have to cast our net very far to find the bad. El Nino is about the best we can do.

Does this mean that the news will only get better? On the contrary. With every passing month of such profound tranquillity and prosperity, the implausibility of these times becomes all the more striking.

Golden ages never last. There might be a sudden crisis, perhaps a collapse of economic confidence coming from the Asian contagion. Or perhaps just a gradual undoing of all the self-reinforcing good news: a spike of inflation, a little recession, a rise in welfare, and the whole cycle slowly reverses itself.

I hold with those who say this lovely world will end in ice, not fire. But either way, it must surely end. So enjoy it while it lasts. Because it won't.



New Jersey Allows Gays to Adopt As Married Couples

Judith Havemann

NEW JERSEY last week became the first state in the nation to allow gay partners to jointly adopt children on the same basis as married couples.

Immediately characterized as an important benchmark in gay rights, the new policy resulted from the settlement of a class-action lawsuit brought by a gay couple in New Jersey who sought to adopt a child from the state's foster care program.

While its practical effect extends only to children in the custody of the state of New Jersey, gay rights advocates said that it places all unmarried couples in the state on equal footing with married couples for the first time, and will vastly streamline the adoption process for gays seeking to adopt.

Gay men and lesbians have been working on several fronts to win legal recognition for their personal and family relationships, seeking "domestic partnership" legislation, equality with heterosexual couples for healthcare, life insurance benefits, and equal opportunity to adopt and obtain custody and visitation rights.

Already, a handful of states and the District of Columbia allow gay couples to adopt children in a complex and expensive two-step process, in which first one parent is allowed to adopt and then the second can petition for joint rights.

But the practical effect in New Jersey of allowing both adults to adopt together is that, at the outset, they obtain the same legal rights and responsibilities for the child. That issue is important for several reasons. It's a signal from the state that a gay couple can act as a family unit. More critically, it could determine a child's fate if something happened to one parent.

In addition, married couples tend to have an advantage over single people in seeking adoption rights. With New Jersey law now allowing gays as well as unmarried heterosexual couples equal adoption rights, the automatic advantage of married couples would disappear.

The case involved a couple, Michael Galluccio, 35, and Jon Holden, 34, of Maywood, who had been caring for a 2-year-old foster child since he was 3 months old. The child, Adam, was addicted to cocaine and exposed to HIV when he was born.

When the couple attempted to adopt him jointly, they were informed that Galluccio would have to go through the adoption process first, and then Holden. This would take time and cost extra money.

The couple sued, charging that the state was violating their rights to equal protection under both state and federal law.

It's Showtime, NBA Style, on Bosnian TV Stations

William Drozdiak in Sarajevo

WHEN AMERICAN, French, Italian and other soldiers seized four broadcast transmitters in the Serb-controlled half of Bosnia in October, they wanted to halt the inflammatory and distorted propaganda that had whipped up ethnic animosities and helped shatter a multicultural community shared by generations of Serbs, Croats and Muslims.

But once they captured the television towers, NATO commanders found themselves in the uncomfortable role of media programming executives. In all of their preparations for the Bosnia peacekeeping mission, there was little anticipation that American soldiers would have to worry about what to show on television.

"We know that Serbs like to watch television rather than read newspapers," said Gen. Wesley Clark, NATO's supreme commander. "We did not want to punish the people, but we wanted to make sure that the opponents of the Dayton peace process could no longer use the . . . media to spread their message of hatred."

After employing the "stick" to seize the transmitters, Clark said, the next challenge was to find the right "carrot" to win the sympathies of Serb viewers. The answer came in an offer from the National Basketball Association to donate telecasts of two NBA games a week for Bosnian basketball fans.

As part of a $12 million U.S. aid package to reform the media, Robert Gelbard, the Clinton administration's special envoy to Bosnia, declared that NBA games, along with popular films and TV programs to be donated by the U.S. entertainment industry, would only be made available to Bosnian stations "which are prepared to participate as open and democratic media."

The U.S. offer effectively shuts out Radio-TV Pale, the network in the Sarajevo suburb that serves as the power base of Radovan Karadzic, the hard-line Bosnian Serb nationalist and indicted war crimes suspect. The people of the former Yugoslavia are manic basketball fans, and the ban against Karadzic's station undoubtedly came as a cruel blow to his supporters.

NATO commanders now believe the prospect of NBA games and popular American TV series will attract many Bosnian Serb viewers to SRT-Banja Luka, the station loyal to Karadzic's arch-rival Biljana Plavsic, the president of the Bosnian Serb Republic who has shown a willingness to cooperate with the Dayton peace accords.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY December

Firms Spend Big in Battle On Tobacco

Saundra Torry

THE TOBACCO industry, gearing up to do battle over a proposed national settlement with opponents, spent $15.8 million employing different lobbyists to press its views on tobacco-related issues in the first half of this year, according to a study by Public Citizen, a consumer group founded by Ralph Nader.

Public Citizen, which opposes the $368.5 billion tobacco deal, said the companies and industry lobbying organizations used 37 in-house representatives and 149 outside lawyers and lobbyists in that period — "unleashing more than one lobbyist for every three members of Congress." Much of the money, more than $9.4 million, was spent on the outside lobbyists, Public Citizen found by culling through lobby fee disclosures filed in Congress.

"Big tobacco is hiring some expensive guns to lobby for its dangerous deal," said Public Citizen President Joan Claybrook, who added that much more would likely be spent "if this legislation comes to the fore" in 1998. "As someone who used to work for the industry told me, 'There is never too much for the industry to spend.'"

The industry is in a monumental fight over the multifaceted tobacco deal reached in June after negotiations with state attorneys general, private lawyers and some public health representatives. The industry agreed to broad marketing restrictions and payments of $368 billion over 25 years in exchange for protection against a wide range of lawsuits. The deal must be approved by Congress, where jockeying over the proposal already has begun.

An industry spokesman contested Public Citizen's characterization of the expenditures as tobacco-related, saying that the industry "has many, many business activities beyond just tobacco."

Further, said spokesman Scott Williams, as part of the proposed settlement, the industry would pay at least $1 billion annually for smoking-cessation programs and another $500 million a year for anti-smoking marketing campaigns.

Critics of large lobbying expenditures have said that the tobacco industry gains extra influence by combining its lobbying effort with huge campaign contributions. In the first six months of this year, the industry contributed more than $1.9 million to political party committees and $587,000 to candidates — the vast majority to Republicans, according to a study by Common Cause.

Meanwhile the nation's first statewide ban on smoking in bars goes into effect in California on January 1. Assembly Bill 13, the anti-smoking measure, was passed in 1995 to ban smoking in virtually all workplaces but exempted bars and casinos until the end of 1997 after bitter legislative fights led by lobbyists for the tobacco industry and such anti-smoking groups as the American Lung Association.

Apart from the usual disagreements over the effects of secondhand smoke and heated rhetoric over personal freedoms, the debate on the smoking ban has centered largely on the cash register and the bar owners' claims that their best patrons will be driven out of the pubs and into their family television rooms.

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The Washington Post · Le Monde

Martin Walker looks forward to the year in Europe

Blair faces tough test at EU helm

THE coming year in Europe opens with Britain's six-month turn at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. Britain in turn will be succeeded by Austria. These two stints will each in their way set the stage for the decisive year of 1999, when a new German government, with a mandate from the electorate this autumn, grapples as only the EU's paymaster can with the grand challenge of the budget that will finance enlargement, and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and Structural Funds.

In this sense, Europe in 1998 will be marking time, and digesting the big decisions it has taken on the coming of the single currency and on enlargement. In May, the countries that will formally sign up for the euro will be selected, ironically under the chairmanship of a member which will not be joining the new currency. The price Britain could yet pay for this was signalled by the warning from four big United States-based corporations that their future investment plans in Britain could suffer.

"The temptation would be to favour the euro zone because of the uncertainties surrounding the relationship between the pound and the euro," said Jean-Pierre Rosse, chairman of the Case machinery group. Bill Hudson, chairman of the world's biggest producers of electric connectors, the AMP group, said that some operations had already closed at three British plants in 1997. Ingersoll-Rand's James Perella said that staying out of the euro would probably have "a detrimental effect" on investment decisions. All this was given point by the decision late last year of Toyota to build a new car plant at Valenciennes in France, rather than expand its British operations.

Britain was the recipient last year of $25 billion in inward investment, almost half of it from the US, followed by the Netherlands, with $4 billion. Then came Germany and France, followed by Australia with $1.6 billion, and Japan, unusually far down the league with only $600 million. The effect of the financial devastation which hit Asian economies last summer and autumn suggests that Japan and South Korea are unlikely to be pumping large sums into a non-euro currency Britain in the future.

It is worth noting that the UK invested far more abroad than it took in. British overseas investments last year were almost $34 billion, and now total $315 billion, which brought earnings of more than $40 billion, a new record. But something has changed. In 1995, most of Britain's overseas investment went to the US and Canada. Last year, the biggest recipient was the Netherlands, which took 29 per cent of the total, followed by France with 10 per cent. The US took just 9 per cent.

So British investors, at least, seem to be turning to Europe with more resolve than their politicians. As the financial evidence starts to accumulate of the costs to Britain of staying out of the single currency, the Blair government may yet accelerate its plans for the election and referendum that have been promised before the big decision to drop sterling in favour of the euro is taken. But it will not be this year, and probably not in 1999 either.

The meeting in May which picks the new euro zone members will also see the finance ministers set the exchange rates at which each of the first-wave countries will change their marks, francs and guilders into the euro. Barring accidents, Italian lire, Spanish pesetas and Portuguese escudos will also be joining the euro, however much these traditionally more volatile currencies worry the German Bundesbank. So Britain will play the role of midwife, helping the delivery of a new currency for the world's biggest trading block, without itself benefiting, and without having much say in the crucial matter of how the euro will relate to the dollar, its rival as the world's reserve currency.

Britain's semi-detachment will be tested by its stint at the EU presidency. Still, for the first time in 20 years, Britain is taking the helm of the Council of Ministers without being implacably prejudiced against the European project. The price of that hostility was to make Europe the killing ground for the last two prime ministers. It broke Mrs Thatcher and destroyed John Major.

Europe can now also be the making of Tony Blair as a statesman of international rank. The temptation is clear before him. Chancellor Helmut Kohl is 68 this year, visibly tired and facing a tough election. President Jacques Chirac has been diminished by his party's election defeat, and shares power with the socialist prime minister Lionel Jospin. The EU Commission is run by the contentedly uncharismatic Jacques Santer, so Blair's opportunity to bestride an unusually thin European stage is dazzling.

But so is the need to do so. Labour's ministers have had a painful lesson in just how deep run the animosity and resentment which earlier British governments have provoked in Europe; witness the bruises from the failed attempt to gatecrash the Euro-X club that will manage the single currency.

> **Britain will play the midwife, helping the delivery of a new currency without itself benefiting and without having much say in how the euro will relate to the dollar**

Tony Blair's semi-detachment from President Chirac and his other European colleagues will be tested in 1998 PHOTOGRAPH IAN WALDIE

The agenda for the next six months is unlikely to fulfil the British Cabinet's hopes that it can finally show that New Labour means a new, positive and committed role in Europe. Apart from the euro, the second major theme of enlarging the EU to include eastern and central European countries will be tough. Britain gets the sticky job of chairing the meetings at which Greece will have to bullied into being less intractable over Turkey.

The enlargement process will open with great pageantry in London, probably at the end of February, but the exact date is still to be determined. But that ceremony will probably be the only easy bit, whether or not Turkey can be sweet-talked into coming.

December's Luxembourg summit decided that in reality only the five judged to be the most suitable candidates will make the first wave: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Slovenia and Cyprus. The others — Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and maybe Slovakia — will have to wait. The EU is striving to keep everyone happy with half the $80 billion worth of aid to be allocated from EU coffers to the applicant countries in the course of the next nine years. That funding itself will cause strains among existing member states, particularly those regions and sectors that will lose money to pay for it. Enlargement will increase the population of the community by 28 per cent, but will add only 4 per cent to the club's gross domestic product.

With such unpromising prospects for the big issues, Blair is pushing the smaller but flashy ones, such as the nebulous concept of the People's Europe, even though his own people are the least enthusiastic Europeans of the lot. And in Brussels at least, irritation has greeted the curious suggestion that Europe, like Britain, needs re-branding with a younger image. Europe has yet to learn much about that magician of marketing, Peter Mandelson; they will not be spared for long.

The new British logo for its presidency, national stars drawn by children, has not impressed Euro-politicians, who wonder if Blair is more style than substance. Italians have been slightly miffed to find themselves characterised by a pizza. The French are baffled by what appears to be a series of drawings of their flag behind bars.

The point is that Blair and his government cannot get away with merely a marketing job. There is serious work to be done, starting with the new British focus on the environment and adding teeth to the vague Amsterdam treaty notion of "sustainable development". Down at the EU coalface, there are a lot of less glamorous but useful tasks in pushing the last, hard bits of the single market such as genuinely portable pensions and benefits.

Finally, do not overlook the strain factor. To hold the rotating Presidency of the European Council for six months means a crowded schedule. The task involves hosting and chairing all meetings, which means that British ministers must prepare the agenda and draft the conclusions and compromises. The biggest deals of all must be crafted by Blair himself, the man finally responsible for a presidency at which Britain dare not be seen to fail.

Six months from now, as Europe's leaders peer at the splendours of Cardiff and ponder Blair's motive in picking the Welsh capital for his summit, there will be a fairly simple test to establish whether Britain's presidency has succeeded or not. This will not be simply the absence of a row. Rows are expected, and people would miss their absence. It is the nature of the row, and its likelihood of being settled, that will matter.

The two worst-case scenarios are a row over Bosnia, with Blair unable to deploy his vaunted friendship with the White House to ensure that Clinton sticks to his pledge to keep US troops on after June, and a row over the euro. Britain is expected to chair honourably the meeting at which the countries joining the single currency are named. They should number 11, including Italy and Belgium whose debt levels do not really meet the Maastricht criteria. Thatcher might have made mischief with this. Blair and Chancellor Gordon Brown will not.

The next-worst scenario would be a row over Turkey. This is likely if Greece continues to block the obvious solution, which is for the EU to spell out what Turkey must do on

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So who's playing the role of she-devil now?

FAY WELDON'S claim that feminism may have gone too far is only valid for that élite group of middle-aged, middle-class women to which she herself belongs (Pity the men of today, December 21).

Her research seems severely limited: she makes ambiguous reference to single mothers for whom, apparently, "the state takes the place of the husband or partner and does the providing". This is wishful thinking of some imagined idyll shattered long before Britain's Social Security Secretary, Harriet Harman, stuck her stilettos in.

As a 30-year-old single mother in full-time employment, I am one of those wicked women who drove the father from the house (he admitted having an affair); changed the locks (to prevent him gaining access while I stayed with a friend to recover some semblance of sanity); gave my ex no visitation rights (he has refused all my lawyer's proposals to date), and contacted the Child Support Agency after what is now seven months without maintenance. Men's inability to communicate doesn't need to be placated by Fay Weldon's silly little fairy-tales.
Lizzie Eldridge,
Arthur Street, Cardiff, Wales

FAY WELDON believes that the fight for women's liberation has gone too far — if only that were true. We teach in an inner-city, all-boys school, where sexism is rife. These boys are not living in a world where they lose out because women have the advantage; they live in a society that promotes sexism affecting both men and women.

Male school students from our borough, aged 14 to 16, were convicted of taking part in a gang rape of a tourist last summer. The authorities dodged the issue, while the media turned these children into monsters in a sex-crime sensation. Moreover Weldon's comments about sexism in the Muslim world are as helpful as the tabloid press's stress on the fact that these boys were immigrants. Did she read about the Irish 13-year-old rape victim who had to fight to come to Britain for an abortion?
Eugenie Woodward and
Simon Blackburn,
London

YOU are wrong, Fay. Your article is premised on erroneous assumptions. Girl Power does not triumph. How can it? It is a false concept, media-perpetuated. Your point that "the current fashion for male loutishness" (when did it go out of fashion?) is a "desperate cry for help — hopefully female help" defies belief. Women took responsibility to effect changes in their own lives and the lives of other women. Men need to take responsibility for themselves, not look to women to make their lives better.
Lorna Fitzpatrick,
Liverpool, Merseyside

IT IS significant that it took a post-feminist authoress to make the Weekly with her all too accurate observations on the degraded nature of modern man. Other male writers — established journalists and sociologists among them — have been making pretty much the same observations for years. For their pains, they have been cold-shouldered, or sniffed at like sour offal by the liberal British press.

Perhaps it is for this reason, rather than any cowardly silence on our part, that the likes of Ms Weldon feel obliged to speak out on our behalf.
Edward Crabtree,
Leicester

Getting the title right

JOHN SPENCER (December 21) asks whether President Mugabe or the Australian prime minister, John Howard, is right in his policies relating to land ownership by indigenous Zimbabweans and Australians. The sole similarity between these two situations seems to be that in both countries indigenous people were dispossessed by European colonists, chiefly British.

So far as Australia is concerned, it needs to be understood that Mr Howard's Ten Point Plan will overturn the existing Native Title Act, a landmark piece of legislation that protects the Aborigines' unique interest in land and respects their cultural and spiritual beliefs. Not surprisingly, because it broke new ground, as it comes into effect some amendments are deemed necessary to make the legislation more workable.

Much deliberate misinformation has been circulated to support the Howard government's regressive amending Bill, including a suggestion that freehold titles could be at risk. This is a mischievous untruth. Furthermore, pastoralists holding leases have been assured that when native title interests conflict with the operation of the pastoral lease, then the pastoral lease prevails. Similarly, while the existing Native Title Act protects the right of Aborigines to negotiate, something not possible under the amending Bill, Aborigines are not given the right of veto over mining development.

Australia, which could once have taken proper pride in the way it was developing a truly multicultural society, now faces what could be a decisive and divisive moment in its history. Apart from refusing to make any substantial amendments to the Ten Point Plan, the government refuses to make, on behalf of the nation, an unqualified apology for past injustices suffered by indigenous Australians. Such intransigence does nothing to further the cause of reconciliation, which so many indigenous and non-indigenous Australians regard as a national priority.
David Dyer,
Buninyong, Victoria, Australia

Carve-up at Big Brother's table

THERE is an urgent need to follow up Larry Elliott's excellent article (Money makes the world go round, October 26) with an exposé of a rather frightening development in globalisation: the drafting of the Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI).

This astonishing document, amounting to "the constitution of a single global economy", has been in gestation within Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) circles for about two years. But the Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch group in the United States has been fortunate in obtaining a copy and has posted it on the Internet, explaining that "there has been virtually no public or political scrutiny of the MAI, yet negotiations have already reached an advanced stage".

What is almost unbelievable is that World Trade Organisation supporters who have worked on the draft develop a globalisation scenario in which corporations and foreign investors, through an unaccountable international tribunal, will have the power to sue governments and others for non-compliance with its provisions. As we have already seen from the activities of the tobacco and other lobbies, advantage lies with anyone who has the financial staying power to sustain court cases lasting years.

Thus, for the MAI, the good guys are the ones who assist in opening up markets so that there is unimpeded movement of capital in international trade. The bad guys are those who still believe that trading comparative advantages is a wealth-creating principle, and that governments exist to protect their citizens from external exploitation.

Politicians are in a double-bind because they cannot be seen to oppose the apparent benefits of liberalisation, yet they know — as Larry Elliott has pointed out in the case of the unfortunate banana growers in the Caribbean — that WTO regulations decree those smallholder farmers must lose their livelihoods because the governments involved have signed relevant Gatt, Nafta, and WTO agreements; possibly without realising their implications.

So perhaps the best way to confront the reality of the slow-motion coup d'état that we are now all involved in is to suggest to our politicians that they too will lose their jobs through redundancy if they do not read, and oppose, the small print of the MAI, and come up with new rules that govern fair trade at global, regional, and local level, before it is too late.

Those readers who want to learn about Big Brother's latest ideas for world domination can access http://www.citizen.org, where clicking on Factsheet gives a summary of the MAI.
Brian Wills,
Anduze, France

Whites who weren't wrong

I READ with interest Richard Hall's obituary of Hastings Kamuzu Banda (From doctor to dictator, December 7) and found it a fair summary of the peculiar career of a very peculiar man. I feel, however, that the piece does a disservice to many of the whites present in Malawi at the time of independence, where it states that "The whites in Malawi — settlers and servants alike — were all behind the little doctor".

My parents (white) were not unique when they had to flee Malawi in 1965 to avoid arrest, nor were the actions of his white opponents forgotten by Banda.

Before leaving for the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh in 1970, Malawian athletes were warned by Banda not to speak to my father, a warden at the student accommodation used as the games village. Being described as "a hyena, even whose saliva is poison" is something that my father is quite proud of, I think, but being told that he and like-minded whites were behind Banda in his seizure of power is insulting.
N Diarmid Ross,
Edinburgh, Scotland

Blair's test on Europe

Continued from page 1
human rights and for its Kurdish minority in order to start the accession process. If Greece ducks, Kohl would be on the spot, since he would prefer to delay the Turkish question indefinitely. An angry Kohl would make for a bad summit.

Almost as bad would be an Anglo-Spanish row on the sidelines over Gibraltar, particularly while Spain is demanding some guarantee that Europe's enlargement to the east will not cut its receipts from the EU budget. Spain pays 6.4 per cent of the EU budget, and gets 15.6 per cent of its funds. Portugal, Ireland and Greece do even better, but Spain has the political muscle.

Skirting trouble on these four fronts would be a sound, if negative achievement for the British presidency. But trying to be too positive is dangerous. Britain's credibility is so low that Blair's team would do better to show calm competence rather than try any bold dashes at brilliance. Beyond the row factor, Blair's tenure will be judged on three main fronts: the interests of Europe, of Britain and of progressive politics.

The UK government has to make a choice, whether to win approving tabloid headlines by scoring nationalist points, or secure a deeper British interest in demonstrating a constructive return to the heart of Europe. After all, Blair confidently expects to run another British presidency in 2004, and clearly does not want to add to the national reputation for stubborn petulance in the meantime. This would mean, for example, showing a preference to safeguard the health of Europe's consumers rather than to seek some special deal for British beef.

Modest goals count to secure Europe's best interests. Britain will look to housekeeping issues such as advancing the single market and putting some teeth into those grand promises at November's jobs summit of some real training for the young unemployed. Judged by Britain's interests, Gordon Brown may be better employed ensuring that the City of London is not disadvantaged in the stock, bond and capital markets by the coming of the euro, rather than pursuing any flamboyant new challenges over status.

The area where Blair could do himself, Britain and Europe most good is by stressing the difference that progressive politics can make. Europe is a secretive place, and Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's promise of transparency in Council matters could prove dramatic. There are serious civil liberties concerns in the working of the new Europol schemes for law enforcement co-operation. Above all, progressive politics means exploiting the conclusions of the jobs summit to help Europe's 18 million unemployed.

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Cheers and fears of the Dalai Lama

Suzanne Goldenberg
in Dehra Dun

HOLLYWOOD'S fascination with Tibet has given powerful public support to its cause in the West, the Dalai Lama said, but it may prompt China to tighten its grip on the kingdom.

In an interview at a Buddhist monastery in a Tibetan refugee settlement near the north Indian town of Dehra Dun — a world from the glitzy American fund-raising events where the dimpled, bespectacled monk in maroon robes is sought out by presidents and movie stars — the Dalai Lama said he was cheered by the growing sympathy for Tibetan self-rule.

Celebrities such as Richard Gere, Harrison Ford and Goldie Hawn have condemned Beijing's repression of the 6 million Tibetans, traditional handicrafts have become a runaway success in New York, and the Chinese president, Jiang Zemin, was visibly taken aback by the noisy protests that awaited him on his visit to the United States in October.

Seven Years In Tibet, starring Brad Pitt, has been a box office hit in the United States, Martin Scorsese's film Kundun was due to be released on Christmas Day, and four other films about Tibet are in preparation.

"It is a tremendous boost for increasing awareness about Tibet among the public, these films. So from that viewpoint it is good," the Dalai Lama said. "Either he [Mr Jiang] gets angry, so the situation may worsen, or he notices something and says, 'Oh, it might be better now to find some solution'. Either is possible."

Seven Years In Tibet is the story of the Austrian mountaineer — with SS links, as the film-makers belatedly discovered — from whom the Dalai Lama learnt his English.

Pirated copies on video are making the rounds of Dharamsala, the seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile in the Indian Himalayas, but the Dalai Lama is waiting to see the film during an upcoming visit to the US.

The Tibetan god-king gave script approval to Scorsese's film, Kundun. This film, which has caused the most offence to Beijing so far, tells the story of his life before his flight to India in 1959.

The Dalai Lama hopes the public pressure produced by such films, as well as the appointment of Gregory Craig in October as Washington's co-ordinator on Tibet, may break a decade of deadlock with Beijing.

"Since direct communication with the Chinese government is no longer there, someone like him or any other who can help to dispel or reduce suspicion is needed," the Dalai Lama said.

On the day of our meeting, the Tibetan leader was to deliver a teaching at the Ngorkhang monastery at Manduwala, a remote outpost among the settlements housing the 100,000 Tibetan exiles in India.

To the crashing of cymbals and the blowing of horns and conch shells, his gold Mercedes halted between the columns of bowing monks and fluttering coloured flags. A beaming Dalai Lama sprang out of the front seat and walked up a red hand-painted cloth to the monastery.

He took his seat beneath the richly painted ceiling of the monastery, and the chanting of ancient scriptures began. Women bearing bolts of rich brocaded cloth filed in, and monks bent among the crowd, pouring salted tea.

Religious and cultural safeguards are crucial to any eventual settlement in Tibet, the Dalai Lama believes. Although it disappointed the more radical Tibetans when he dropped the demand for outright independence from Beijing nearly a decade ago, he argues that a complete break from China would do Tibet no good.



The Dalai Lama approved the script of Martin Scorsese's film Kundun, which has caused the most offence to Beijing so far

"Tibet is a landlocked country, a big area with a small population, quite rich in natural resources but with difficult communications and very, very backward.

"To achieve development or speed it more efficiently, the Chinese role is very important. As far as material development is concerned, we might get greater benefit, provided there are safeguards for our own religious and spiritual traditions."

This is the more familiar role of the spiritual leader of a deeply religious people, and such ceremonies are evidence of Tibetans' success in preserving their culture during more than 40 years in an alien land. But the Dalai Lama does not distinguish between such duties and his public mission to win international support for Tibet.

"To me, there is no difference whether president, beggar or king," he said. Of his friends in Hollywood? "I think generally they are kind people," he replied.

He is similarly kindly disposed to Heinrich Harrer, the Austrian mountaineer and SS member who is played by Brad Pitt in Seven Years In Tibet.

The Dalai Lama, aged 62, was a teenager when Mr Harrer arrived at the Potala palace in Lhasa after the second world war to fix a film projector, a gift from Britain.

His own awareness of the war in the seclusion of the palace was sketchy. "At that time I got the impression that there were Germany, Italy and Japan on one side, and on the other side, the United States, the whole of western Europe and the Soviet Union. I got the impression of three small nations bullied by many big nations, so I had some sympathy for Germany."

He has kept in touch with Mr Harrer. At a meeting in Italy last year they discussed the Nazi associations. "I told him a fact is a fact, that the truth has to be accepted," the Dalai Lama said. "At that time when Harrer joined the SS, probably it was through the enthusiasm of the young people. It was a sort of patriotism."

Such misguided patriotism has also surfaced in the exile community of late, where religious sectarianism has combined with frustration at Beijing's failure to entertain a dialogue with Tibetans. Last year three monks among the Dalai Lama's closest associates were murdered in Dharamsala.

"Every day the number of factions is growing," said one of the many security guards who accompany the Dalai Lama on his journeys around India.

Critics of the Dalai Lama say that although he is healthy, time is running out. Beijing may prefer to wait until Tibet ceases to be fashionable in the West and the older generation with its roots in the mountain kingdom passes on.

The Dalai Lama is unperturbed. "If I die, or there is an airplane crash or something happens, then of course there is an immense setback, there is no doubt," he said. "But as a nation we will survive."

Democracy fails to boost Tanzania economy

Andrew Meldrum
in Dar es Salaam

ONE by one they entered the conference hall. Tanzania's president, Benjamin Mkapa, his predecessor, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, and the country's first president, Julius Nyerere. Smiling broadly, the three politicians waved to the applauding crowd at the congress of the ruling party, Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), held in November in Dodoma, central Tanzania.

The scene dramatically illustrated Tanzania's success in achieving peaceful, democratic transitions of government. Very few other African countries, if any, can boast of having a current president and two former leaders together in the same room. By the measures of the continent, the country's political stability is an impressive achievement.

"We are very proud to have a united nation with no tribalism, no racism and good relations between all our social classes," says the finance minister, Daniel Yona.

"We owe a great deal of those achievements to our first president, Julius Nyerere, and the socialist values that were encouraged during his years in power [from 1961 to 1985]. Our nation has a solid foundation of peace and harmony."

Perhaps one of the most important things that Mr Nyerere did was simply to retire. It was almost unprecedented for an African head of state to step down from office voluntarily. With his ground-breaking retirement, Mr Nyerere influenced other grand old men of Africa's first wave of independence to step down from power, such as Kenneth Kaunda and Hastings Banda in the neighbouring states of Zambia and Malawi.

Mr Nyerere paved the way for the peaceful succession to the presidency of his chosen successor, Ali Hassan Mwinyi. Mr Mwinyi led Tanzania to multi-party democracy and agreed to limit his time in office to two five-year terms, ending in 1995.

Unfortunately, Mr Mwinyi's second term was marked by a rise in corruption. Mr Mkapa won the 1995 multi-party elections on an anti-corruption and free enterprise ticket.

Sadly, the country's political success has not been matched economically. Nyrere's legacy was a mixed one, for although his leadership created a unified nation, his socialism ground down the economy to the point of collapse.

"The downside of 30 years of socialism is not hard to see," says Mr Yona. "The system did not engender private initiative; in fact, it discouraged it. It will take us many years of work to recover."

Tanzania's ranking as the world's third-poorest country is glaringly evident from the state of the crumbling and inadequate road network, the regular power failures and the country's dilapidated buildings and factories. But its economic potential is much brighter than it has been in 30 years, thanks to a new spirit of market economics in the government.

Tanzania is a sprawling country covering 945,000 square kilometres (larger than France and Germany combined) with a relatively small population of 30 million people. Gross national product per capita is a lowly $118 per year.

The country is pulling itself out of a dismal period of economic stagnation, with average annual growth of just 1 per cent from 1985-95. The poor economic performance has brought with it low living standards. Life expectancy is just 51 years.

Tanzania has no shortage of fertile land, 80 per cent of the country is still uncultivated. The government's new policies have begun to give farmers incentives to increase production, but efforts to boost agriculture are hindered by the poor road system and virtually non-existent agricultural support services.

"Food rots away in the south and northwest of the country, while other parts of Tanzania are going hungry," says Festus Osunsade, the International Monetary Fund's representative in Dar es Salaam. "The poor road system is the number one reason why agriculture has been slow to respond to the positive market signals."

He says that although Tanzania is the only sub-Saharan African country to achieve such social and political stability, the "challenge is to use the stability as a springboard for economic growth."

Black South Africans read of the 1973 clash between miners and police at the Western Mine, Transvaal

To forgive – and not forget

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is hearing crimes committed under apartheid. Can it help heal the country's divisions, asks **Andrew O'Hagan**

THE most memorable leaders are good at forgetting. They tend to use history however they please. Pinochet and Pol Pot could never remember a thing, unless that thing could be used to enrich their darker purpose. Napoleon and Stalin were just the same, forgetful and forgetting, never ones to wreck the day with an over-abundance of established facts. They say Nicolae Ceausescu could remember nothing of the villages he bulldozed, and had no memory for the names of the women he ordered shot. And so, in our times, it has become a priority for good-thinking governments, on replacing despotic regimes, to begin a process of truth-telling. They want to name the past, see it as it was, open up the common memory, and then move on.

"The struggle of man against power," wrote Milan Kundera, "is the struggle of memory against forgetting." And so it is. There is no future until the past is acknowledged, no way ahead, no betterment, without a public avowal of the evil of before.

Nelson Mandela started his own grand attempt at remembering while still a prisoner on Robben Island. He would write notes on toilet paper, using milk instead of ink, wrapping his tiny scraps of truth in plastic. He would stick them on to passing food drums, hoping that someone further along, someone less isolated, would find a way to smuggle his words out to the world. In the courtyard at Robben Island you can still see the garden where Mandela buried the book he was writing, and you can still feel something of the fear in that enclosure, the fear that truth might never make it over those damp walls.

In 1994 President Mandela revisited the island. He stood by himself, looked across the waters of Table Bay, and told himself that the time had come for the whole of the country to note the truth. He believed that the future demanded it. And so did the new constitution.

While negotiating his way out of apartheid and into democracy, F W de Klerk, the former president, had insisted that amnesty be a part of the new deal, and the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act embedded that in law. If the truth was to be sought, it was to be done so not in a spirit of recrimination and witch-hunt, but in a manner which allowed the former dispensation, and the revolutionary movements that had fought against it, the chance to disclose the truth of their abuses without the fear of prosecution.

It would allow people to question their torturers, and to find out just how and where violations occurred; it would seek to establish the whereabouts of those who had disappeared, and identify the graves of those who were murdered; and it would take measures towards the granting of reparations (money and otherwise) to those who suffered, or whose loved ones suffered. It was a process set to turn South Africa into the Republic of Conscience. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was to become the governing evangelista, under the chairmanship of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, of the nation's new story.

So what is the emerging narrative? Is the process working? Can this bitter confrontation with past evils really help with national unity? Sipho Hashe had been political since he was a boy. He grew up in the Eastern Cape and was sent to jail in Somerset East in 1963 — the authorities said he was burning down schools — and was then kept on Robben Island until 1973. He came back to his home town of Port Elizabeth; in the late 1970s he was discovered to be something of a leader, and was drafted into the ranks of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (Pebco).

Pebco was one of the most effective direct-action groups in South Africa. It had formed in an attempt to oppose water levies and rent increases in the townships, and had organised two widespread strikes at the Port Elizabeth Ford Motor plant in 1979 and 1980. Hashe was a great speaker at meetings and demonstrations. By the mid-1980s Pebco was a major force in frustrating discriminatory practices in the area; it organised rent and consumer boycotts. Hashe became Pebco's secretary, and was joined by the president, Qaqawuli Godolozi, and the organising secretary, Champion Galela.

On May 8, 1985, Hashe was telephoned by a man claiming to be from the British Consulate. He requested a meeting with the Pebco leadership — the notion was that a contribution might be made to the organisation's funds. Hashe agreed, as did Godolozi and Galela.

When they arrived at Port Elizabeth airport, the three men were abducted by black ANC informers (called askaris) who worked out of the Police Security Branch's special hit-squad unit at Vlakplass. They were Johannes Koole, Kimpani Mogoai, and Joe Mamasela. They were under the command of a number of white security policemen — Lieutenant Gideon Niewoudt, Captain "Sakkie" Van Zyl, Gerhardus Lotz, and Warrant Officer Beeslaar.

What happened next is not entirely clear. Mamasela says the men were beaten to death with a metal pipe. The white officers contradict this. They say captives were interrogated lightly, given drugged coffee and shot in the back of the head. Their bodies were burnt.

New Brighton township, Port Elizabeth, November 1997. It is 12 years since the deaths of the Pebco Three. For most of that time their families had no idea what had happened to them: there were suspicions, but also there were supposed sightings, and some people felt the three were living in exile.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearing into the case starts with a musical note of defiance. Many of the young men dance around the hall singing songs of freedom. Up on stage are the men involved in the slayings, seeking amnesty and trying to argue out the truth. The audience is several hundred strong — strong on blacks, weak on whites — and their whistles keep you right about what is going wrong. And something is going wrong — people are lying.

One of the great problems with the form of amnesty being offered in South Africa is that it is easier to admit to murder than to torture or assault. If you were following orders and keen to uphold the government of the day, you can just about get away with murder, but how do you explain hitting a handcuffed man with an iron bar? One of the TRC officials told me it was always going to get difficult when it came to the amnesty part of the whole process.

"The humanitarian hearings were easy," she said. "It was heartrending, but clearly cathartic and hopeful. People felt there was a sense of correction and righteousness about those hearings — victims of torture asking those who hurt them to explain — but these hearings, the ones for amnesty, are seen by some to be much more divisive. These guys up there, these applicants, surrounded by lawyers, are trying to get off. They committed gross illegalities, but if they tell the whole truth, and if they can prove they did it for political reasons, then they will walk away."

A young black man told me the commission was being insulted by these men. "They're all lying," he said. The commission has no powers of prosecution — if an application for amnesty fails, the applicant would have to be tried by the outside courts, and evidence presented at the hearings is inadmissible as evidence there. The commission has not had the easiest of rides either. The South African Police Service has tried to argue that the TRC is unconstitutional; they see it is an attempt by the ANC to punish the people who punished them, and to avenge their former adversaries.

The great goal of confronting the past, of renewing the country by looking at truth, is somewhat hampered by the feeling that the real perpetrators, the P W Bothas and Chief Buthelezis, want nothing to do with it. Botha thinks it is a sham, and Buthelezi a circus. Even former president De Klerk could not convince Botha to join him in submitting explanations of why the Nationalist party felt it was doing the right things. And he refused to

'They committed gross illegalities. But if they tell the truth they will walk away'

turn up when subpoenaed to appear in the week before Christmas.

Critics feel the TRC is not getting close to the people who gave the orders. Aryeh Neier, president of the Open Society Institute, gave voice to the problem. "In Nuremberg," he said, "those tried first were the top Nazi criminals, in Tokyo the same. Those tribunals established legitimacy. In Greece too, those who were tried were the top officials of the military; the lower-level officers were let off in order that they testify against the higher-level officials."

De Klerk feels the TRC is increasingly losing its conciliatory spirit. "The commission is not perceived to be impartial," he said, "its composition is seen to be overwhelmingly representative of only one side in the former conflict . . . the broad perspective of the ANC and its allies. Its investigations have been targeted almost exclusively against those associated with the former government, and its behaviour at times appears to be increasingly aggressive and prosecutorial . . . little is said, written or reported about the abuses perpetrated by those who were opposed to the government."

De Klerk said he could see little evidence of a search for "common ground", making reference to Winnie Mandela's unforgettable remark of April 1986: ". . . with our boxes of matches and our necklaces, we shall liberate this country."

The hearing involving Winnie Mandela may have served to temper the view that the process is one-sided. But it is a matter of fact that Desmond Tutu is in a rage about De Klerk and Botha. He is amazed they can say they personally knew nothing of the atrocities. "I am among many," said Tutu, "that went to this government with information about the sorts of things that we are now investigating. There was almost an avalanche of information; to say you do not know, I find that difficult."

The men responsible for the elimination of the Pebco Three were carrying out orders. That is one way of looking at it. Yet even De Klerk, whose other words have given a rationale to those men seeking amnesty, called the slayings "unauthorised and *mala fide*".

People in the Nationalist party are quite fond of the notion that such actions were "aberrations", departures from the normal way of dealing with dissidents. Yet the Security Branch officers seeking amnesty for what they did to Hashe, Godolozi and Galela are all certain that they were carrying out an essential action that had, if not a piece of paper, then certainly the tacit approval of the government of the day.

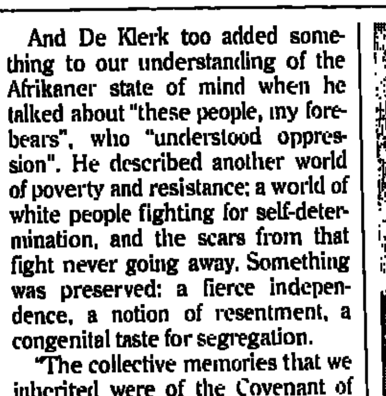
Two policemen are seeking amnesty at the Pebco hearing who were not present at the slayings: Harold Snyman and Hermanus Barend du Plessis. Snyman was present in the detention room where Steve Biko met his death. Speaking only recently about that incident, Snyman said things like, "I am not sure who hit him and who got hit", though he admitted he had lied to an inquest about when the assault took place — lying, he said, under pressure from his commander, so that it would not be revealed that a doctor was not called to Biko until two days after the beating.

At the Centenary Hall in New Brighton, Snyman tries to save himself. His evidence to the commission throws a little light, and a lot of shadow, over just who authorised the killing of the Pebco Three. Snyman speaks weakly in Afrikaans. He is clearly shattered.

"Personally," he says, "I had problems with the killing of people. But I came to the conclusion that the only way forward was for these three people to be eliminated . . . I had problems with my conscience, and, as a Christian, I could not reconcile myself to this sort of action. At that stage we executed the policy of the government."

Snyman says there was great anxiety in the middle of 1985 about the fact that the security forces were losing control of the Eastern Cape. A state of near-anarchy was thought to exist there, and all methods of dealing with it — all legal methods — were not working. Snyman says he was taken aside by Louis Le Grange, then minister for law and order, and was told to "make a plan" with regard to the Pebco activists. "Fight fire with fire."

continued on page 5



Dissonant voices: Archbishop Desmond Tutu (left) is presiding over a process which he hopes will result in a new start for the nation. Former prime minister P W Botha (below) has called the process a 'sham' and will not submit an explanation of why the Nationalist party behaved as it did during apartheid

Continued from page 4

Snyman did not ask the minister to elucidate; neither did he ask him for any sort of written authorisation. He simply took it as an order that the Pebco leaders should be eliminated. Snyman told Du Plessis to carry out the order. Du Plessis, up on stage, looked ill. He was yellow. "Port Elizabeth was ungovernable," he said. "Pebco was in control here. If one wants to say there was a war — they won it." "Eliminate, neutralise, take out. Were these words commonly heard through the higher command?" "Yes," he said.

"What did these terms mean to a policeman, coming from politicians?" "It meant they had to be killed." So there it was: P W Botha's minister for law and order told Snyman, a divisional security branch chief, to "make a plan" in relation to the Pebco Three; Snyman told the chief in Port Elizabeth, Hermanus Du Plessis, to put together a team to carry out the operation; Du Plessis asked "Sakkie" Van Zyl to take some officers and some askaris; and Van Zyl decided to abduct the three men, take them to Post Chalmers and there (depending on whose truth you follow) either to interrogate them, to beat them to death and hide their bodies, or to interrogate them, drug them, shoot them and dispose of the remains.

So something of the truth is finally out. What can be done with it? The families of the dead men sit across from the murderers. They

'If you don't have some accepted history you will not gel as a community'

have heard something. Kimpani Mogoai, one of the askaris, stands up. "I have taken this opportunity to speak the truth," he says. "I regard myself as a disgrace to my mother, my family, my relatives, my friends, the families of the Pebco Three, and the nation. It is with deepest remorse that I ask for forgiveness, and hope and wish to be reconciled with everybody once more, and be part of a better and brighter future for South Africa."

The man is weeping. The crowd is silent. The Afrikaans poet Antjie Krog knows this is all necessary. And it would have been necessary at the end of the Anglo-Boer war too. "More than 26,000 women and children died in British concentration camps and elsewhere during the Anglo-Boer War," she wrote. "Wasn't the mere fact that the abuses of the war were never exposed perhaps not a key factor in the character that formulated apartheid's laws? What would have happened if acknowledgment had been made about British wrongs and forgiveness asked? A formulation of basic human rights and the respect that ought to be accorded them might have become part of the history of this country."

Perhaps she is right. Memory was never allowed to replenish the future in South Africa, never allowed to take its place in the national identity, to make old wrongs less easily repeated. "Apartheid divided us so successfully," she added, "that practically no South African can claim memories other than those forged in isolated vacuums. People lived out their lives unaware that horrific actions . . . were taking place in the buildings next to them. Every one of us has half a memory."

And De Klerk too added something to our understanding of the Afrikaner state of mind when he talked about "these people, my forebears", who "understood oppression". He described another world of poverty and resistance; a world of white people fighting for self-determination, and the scars from that fight never going away. Something was preserved: a fierce independence, a notion of resentment, a congenital taste for segregation.

"The collective memories that we inherited were of the Covenant of Blood River," said De Klerk, "the oath that was taken at Paardekraal to regain our independence from the British; our victory at Majuba and the bitterness of our defeat in the Anglo-Boer War in 1902."

So there you have it. There are many blood rivers in a country like South Africa, and many forgettings that have never been forgotten. The new process of truth and reconciliation refers specifically to crimes committed since 1960 under apartheid, but lurking beneath the surface of that rubric, under its popular momentum, there may be other truths, and other reconciliations, waiting to happen. And all of these concerns are seeping imperfectly into the new South African day.

It may take thousands of days to see them clearly, but almost everyone you talk to in South Africa believes in the basic principle being enacted. Reconciliation, they say, cannot even be thought about without some sort of reckoning with the past, and the past that most people are talking about is the time of apartheid. "I am ready to forgive," said one woman, "but I need to know who, and for what."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said a prayer before our interview in Cape Town. On the desk behind him sat a copper bust of Robert F Kennedy. "If you don't have some accepted history," he said, "the chances are you will not gel as a community. Look at Northern Ireland or Bosnia. They have different understandings of what took place, and they use them to blow up the resentments that the original events caused, or exposed."

As people know, history is most often written by the victors, and I wondered if the process of truth-seeking would not become an exercise in blaming. Would it be possible to avoid the situation where Nationalist whites were witch-hunted? "The truth of the matter is, atrocities were committed," Tutu said. "They didn't just happen, somebody was the perpetrator. And while it is true that awful things were done on both sides, the fact that five top judges of this country have said that apartheid wasa gross violation of human rights, and the vast bulk of its victims were black, it is clear you are going to find there is no equivalence.

"There were those who systematically set out, as a matter of public policy, to carry out a scheme that was buttressed on lies. The system itself was a lie. And the acknowledgement of this does not necessarily land someone in court — it lands them in something like the confessional."

And why this method? Why are truth and reconciliation put together with amnesty? "We were on the verge of catastrophe," Tutu said. "This country nearly went up in flames. There is almost always a right time for something to have happened — I like it in Galatians, 'in the fulness of time' — and a number of things coincided to make this just the right time for this kind of compromise to succeed. One of the things that was agreed was the provision of amnesty . . . the security forces would not have allowed the transition to happen in the way that it did otherwise. But we wanted full disclosure, in public."

I asked him about the business of forgiveness. Is it possible for a nation to forgive, for a race group to forgive, or is that power of forgiveness within the power of an individual alone? "Ah," he said, "we Africans are not like you Europeans. We are a great deal more communal. You are the great individualists. Each has advantages, but we say a person is a person through other persons, the solitary individual is a contradiction in terms. Something that happens here to an individual impacts on the whole community."

And how might he feel about people entering this process and not telling the truth? "Are you surprised?" he asked. "Which one of us has ever enjoyed saying sorry? ... But it is a perception [that the process is one-sided] from people who are already beleaguered, especially the Afrikaans. But the English-speakers tend to have an arrogance — you know, 'We didn't . . .' — but they voted these Nats into power election after election with increasing majorities. They were enjoying the fruits; now they want to pretend they didn't support apartheid. Have you ever found anybody who supported apartheid? No — absolutely nobody supported it, not even the Nats!"

The British newspapers? "Absolutely. When you think of the number of them who were ridiculing us when we were calling for sanctions. Extraordinary. But anyway we are here now, and it's a miracle, and no country has ever been prayed for as we have." Prayers? "Well, this is ultimately spiritual. Politicians don't usually speak about forgiveness . . . we are speaking about grace. We are lucky to have such an example of magnanimity in the president. He is not the only one but he happened to be there. Here was someone who could go and have tea with the wives of former government leaders."

Tutu continued in hopes of better days. And there is no escaping the religiosity of his quest. One of the main things about the truth and reconciliation business is the extent to which it is drenched in the language of Christian redemption. There is much talk of cleansing, of healing, of bearing witness, of joining hands across the great divide, and a spirit of New Testament forgiveness, at least among many who speak of it; it is checked by very few others with a furious notion of Old Testament vengeance. But all over the country people have picked up the language of the TRC. It is not always clear how much they believe in it, but you hear it spoken none the less.

The widow of Sipho Hashe lives in the township of Kwazakhele. The new dwellings you pass on the way to her house are breeze-block huts meant for eight people. These will one day replace the corrugated iron shanties on the townships' edges, and the government is building 5 million of them.

Most of the people you meet speak about *ubuntu*. It stands for humanity, and a sort of forgiveness. In most places, and in most people, this was a wish and a prayer, one of the higher pledges, and one that was hard to live by, after all that had passed. But Mrs Hashe was full to the brim with *ubuntu*. As she spoke of the days when she would help her husband to write political speeches, and when they would go out together and sell vegetables, she cried a little.

"For a long time there was no glass in our bedroom window," said Mrs Hashe. "The police had put petrol bombs through there. They were trying to kill us for a long time. The day after my husband disappeared I went to the prison and we looked over the prison walls, thinking we would see him there, but nothing. And that night the police attacked our house. And in the time

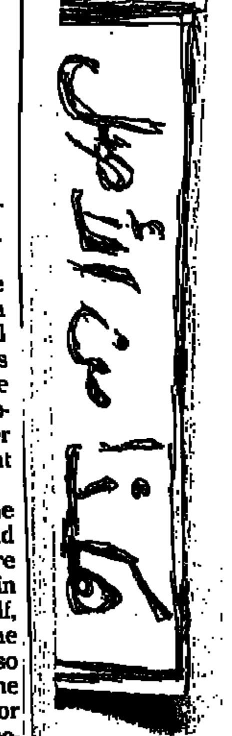
'The truth commission has done a lot for me: I know what happened to my husband'

after that I looked for my husband. But I never did find him."

Mrs Hashe had been part of the struggle for freedom in South Africa. She was once imprisoned herself. When her husband was gone she felt alone, and thought she might never know all that had happened. The hearing into the murder of the Pebco Three has brought something to an end for her.

"I am proud of my husband," she said. "He had the good heart, and he would tell the police, 'You are killing our people, and we belong in this South Africa'. I said to myself, well, they killed him, but what he wanted was peace in our country, so for him why don't I reconcile? The truth commission has done a lot for me: now I can look and see the people, and I know what happened to my husband. It has come out. And it is better that way. I don't want any more blood spilled in South Africa, what these people did was enough."

Mrs Hashe will some day have a little money from the TRC. It can never stand in for all that has lost. Yet she looks forward to it. "My husband learned much about business on Robben Island," she said "and he taught me. Some day I would like once again to own the vegetable stall."



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Clinton misses out as good times roll

Martin Kettle

IF THE world will probably remember 1997 for the birth of a cloned sheep in Scotland and for the death of an iconic princess in Paris, it was also the year in which Hong Kong, one of world capitalism's greatest powerhouses, was uneasily consigned to the largest communist state on the planet and in which, partly as a consequence, the once awesome Asian tiger economies stumbled to their knees.

It was an unwelcome intimation of mortality for the confident new world economic order of the 1990s, and was an event which sent reverberations around a global economy in which political leaders on every continent are still struggling to find a means of imposing some meaning and upholding their authority.

Ironically, few leaders had more difficulty in this endeavour than President Bill Clinton, just as no nation has better embodied both the economic confidence and the political uncertainties of the mid-1990s than the acknowledged sole superpower of the post-cold war era, the United States.

On the one hand, the US economy continued to grow and prosper throughout 1997 as almost never before. The US's gross domestic product at constant prices rose by more than 2.5 per cent, with production increasing every month throughout the year, unemployment falling to its lowest rate for 23 years, and corporate profits surging to new records. The stock market rose with exceptional speed during 1997, with the Dow Jones breaching both 7,000 and 8,000 for the first time, before falling back (though only for a while) in the wake of the autumn chill in the Asian economy.

In the 1980s, such non-inflationary expansion and corporate profitability were achieved on the backs of millions of unemployed and through tax redistribution to the rich. But in 1997 it seemed as though full employment and profitability were expanding without causing inflation. Inflation, which had been 3 per cent in 1996, looked set to repeat that result by the end of 1997, and US interest rates, remained historically fairly low. The good times just kept on rolling.

As a result, one problem which had beset every preceding US administration for the past three decades seemed to be suddenly more soluble. Tax revenues from the booming economy flowed with such force into Treasury vaults that the federal budget deficit fell to $25 billion for the year, the lowest figure since 1974. Faced with a much smaller deficit, Clinton and Congress were able to agree on a balanced budget strategy which they agreed would eliminate the deficit altogether by 2002.

On the other hand, American politics did not enjoy the largely untroubled progress of the US economy. Clinton began his second term in the White House with a call, at his second Inaugural, for an end to "bickering and extreme partisanship". But this was wishful thinking. Having been re-elected on the strength of the economic and employment boom (though with only 49 per cent of the votes cast), the first second-term Democratic president since Franklin Roosevelt had a miserable year.

Commentators tend to blame Clinton himself for this failing. Yet the blame, if that is the right word, lies not with him but with the electorate, who had once again voted for a "cohabitation" between a Democratic president and a Republican Congress which neither party wanted. The new Congress elected in November 1996 has clear Republican majorities in both Houses, and a handful of "off-year" elections in November 1997 suggested that this is how the voters want it to stay. The November 1998 midterm elections — in which the whole House of Representatives and just over a third of the Senate will be up for election — are unlikely to change this defining condition of the Clinton presidency.

Clinton's second-term administration contained several important changes from the 1992 team. In particular, the promotion of Madeleine Albright to be the first female Secretary of State in US history brought a popular public figure to the heart of American foreign policy. Albright's actual achievements, on the other hand, were harder to discern. The US made little progress in the Middle East peace process, and Albright was criticised for standing aside as relations between Israel and the Palestinians deteriorated anew. In November, another fudged confrontation with Iraq revealed that the US was paying the price for that failure. And the US was badly out of step with other countries at the world climate conference at Kyoto in December.

On the domestic front, a number of Clinton's appointments fell foul of the Republicans and of embarrassing scandals. His first-choice CIA director, Tony Lake, had to withdraw, complaining that the Republicans made him feel like "a dancing bear in a political circus". In a classic Capitol Hill confrontation, the president failed to get his choice of ambassador to Mexico past Senator Jesse Helms. The year ended with a stand-off over Clinton's attempt to appoint a distinguished Asian American liberal, Bill Lann Lee, to head the Department of Justice's civil rights division.

The real silver lining for Clinton was that the Republicans took to arguing among themselves rather than just trying to humiliate the president. In particular, the lustre which had attached to House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich since 1994 was dulled when he became the first holder of that office to be reprimanded for an ethics violation and was fined $300,000 on a charge of bringing discredit upon the House by using tax-exempt funds for party ends. Gingrich was only narrowly re-elected Speaker in January and has become, if not a busted flush, then damaged goods.

This personal humiliation for Gingrich reflected a deeper crisis in the Republican party which has not yet been solved. The party is enjoying remarkable electoral success, but it remains an unstable coalition between a conservative majority and a liberal minority. The conservatives have the upper hand ideologically, but the liberals remain financially and electorally indispensable. Though strong enough in numbers to defeat the Democrats (who have divisions of their own), the Republicans cannot agree on an agenda that is not so divisive as to be self-damaging. The party that chose Bob Dole even though it did not believe in him shows no sign of getting it right next time.

KAL

HELP US STOP THE SPREAD OF OUTRAGEOUS POLITICAL FUNDRAISING

CHECKS ACCEPTED

Nevertheless the weight of Republican numbers ensured that Clinton had to struggle to get his legislative proposals through a hostile Congress, and was forced to compromise and withhold on liberal legislation. Education reform and a fresh health programme were largely abandoned. Big issues like global warming and the tobacco /health argument had to be finessed through deals.

In one notable case — Clinton's attempt to arm himself with "fast-track" authority to make trade deals which Congress could not amend — the administration was even defeated by an alliance between right-wing Republicans and the bulk of Democratic congressmen. This important snub underlined how detached Clinton has become from many of his own party activists, especially in the trade unions, though it by no means implied that his principal Democratic antagonist, House minority leader Richard Gephardt, was bound to capture the party's nomination for the presidency in 2000. Vice-President Al Gore remains favourite for that honour, in spite of everything.

The fast-track vote was one of two clear signs of the re-emergence of the trade unions in American political life after years of marginalisation and retreat. The other was the Teamsters union's successful strike against the UPS distribution system in August, a victory that enjoyed clear popular support, and a personal triumph for the teamsters' leader Ron Carey. But it was all downhill for Carey after that. Aides admitted that they had laundered union funds into Carey's 1996 re-election campaign fund, and a re-run was ordered. In November a judge barred Carey from standing, and several prominent labour leaders were implicated in the funding inquiry. The high hopes after the UPS victory were back in cold storage.

Carey was far from alone in his money-raising problems. Indeed at times in 1997 it seemed as though the entire American political system was rotten with financial shenanigins. No party was free from accusations that it was bending and breaking the rules established after Watergate to bring propriety back into public life.

Consumption reached record levels and the American people bought more cars, computers and Coca-Colas than ever before

At the top of the heap, both Clinton and Gore faced demanding and relentless assault over their fund-raising for their own re-election campaigns and for the party's wider cause in 1996. Campaign fund-raising was the political leitmotiv of 1997 in Washington, with a series of often highly selective and sectarian inquiries into assiduous and, at times, unlawful fund-raising activities by the Democrats.

In the end, the Republican attempt to show that the president and vice-president had broken the law themselves, by making unlawful fund-raising phone calls from the White House, came to nothing when the Attorney General, Janet Reno, decided against further investigations. But much damage was done by these inquiries, since they exposed Clinton and Gore as politicians obsessed by the need to raise funds to pay for today's increasingly expensive campaign techniques. It did not matter that the Republicans are themselves past masters at this art, nor that the Republicans actually spent more in the 1996 Dole-Kemp campaign than the Democrats did on Clinton-Gore, nor that the Republicans now increasingly spend the Democrats into defeat at local level. What mattered was that Clinton appeared to be selling access to his time, his White House bedrooms and even, some said (falsely), to grave plots in Arlington Cemetery in order to stay in office.

Clinton ended the year by telling a press conference that it had been "a banner year", that he was not a lame duck and that he had a full agenda of "vital issues". Not many of the Washington political class saw it that way, and beyond the capital fewer still. Clinton's presidency remained benign and popularly tolerated within the limits imposed by Republican ascendancy, but it sometimes seemed to have little purpose beyond self-perpetuation and the election of Gore in three years' time. The reality is that the key moment of the second term seems likely to be the almost unthinkably demeaning sexual harrassment hearing against him brought by Paula Jones, which is set to begin in Little Rock in May.

With the economy booming and domestic politics bogged down in technicality and bickering, America got on with enjoying itself in 1997. Consumption reached record levels and the American people bought more cars, computers and Coca-Colas per head than ever before.

Not only did the good times roll, but the bad times seemed to fall away too: crime fell in every major city in the nation, in many cases for the second or third successive year. The US remains a country that is vulnerable to all manner of collective insecurities, from indigestion, through road rage, to germ warfare and cyberterrorism. All of these worries gnaw at the individual and collective psyche. But as long as there are jobs for almost all and as long as inflation is kept in check, it is hardly surprising that most Americans continue to believe that economic prosperity puts everything else in the shade, even the president's "distinguishing characteristics", of which we shall hear far too much in the year to come.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
January 4 1998

Doctor to be HIV guinea pig in vaccine quest

Sarah Boseley

A DOCTOR at the forefront of HIV research in Britain has volunteered to be injected with the virus for trials in California of a potential vaccine.

Mike Youle, director of HIV clinical research at the Royal Free Hospital in London, said he was prepared to take the risk of becoming HIV positive and developing Aids.

"If you go through life worrying about what relative risks are, you end up doing nothing," he said. "You make judgments on what worries you and what bothers you and what needs to be done. This is just something I think is worth doing."

The vaccine trials are being led by Charles Farthing, a New Zealander who started the largest Aids clinic in the UK at St Stephen's Hospital in London in the early 1980s, when the epidemic took hold. Dr Farthing will also be injecting himself with the weakened but live strain of the HIV virus.

Dr Youle worked with Dr Farthing at St Stephen's, now the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, and still holds a clinical post there.

He does not expect miracles from the vaccine, developed by Donald Derosiers of Harvard University.

"I believe the initial vaccine we get will not be completely effective," he said. "You will reduce your chances of getting HIV. But this would make a significant difference to countries that do not have the resources to treat."

Dr Youle, aged 37, took part in a vaccine trial in 1991. This was not the live HIV virus but an artificially created small part of it, called p17, produced by an American company with some British financial backing. "It was shelved in the late 1990s because of its lack of efficacy," he said. "It did not cause any illness but did not dramatically improve the likelihood of resistance."

The new vaccine is very different. "This is a virus that has had bits detached from it. Theoretically it shouldn't be as nasty as the real thing, but viruses chop and change. The worry is that we would get recombination and therefore a nastier form of the virus."

Some risks worry Dr Youle more than others. While he accepts that he may get killed driving around a motorway, he will not travel in the front carriage of a train.

"I am a gay man, so I have a higher risk of getting HIV in this country compared with the general population. This is not true in some other countries."

The proposed trial had already served a useful purpose in focusing attention on the need for a vaccine. The way forward, he believed, was "education hand in hand with a vaccine. We do not want people to believe the vaccine is something that will mean they can throw their condoms away."

Progress in combating HIV had been greater than in finding cures for some other potentially fatal medical conditions, such as multiple sclerosis, he said, because the fear of it had led to a big investment in drugs.

"One advantage of an infectious disease is that people are afraid of it." And so is he. "Half of my friends have died in my arms. I'm nothing if not realistic about what it can do to you."

Dr Youle: fully aware of the risks

He is supported in his decision by his partner and has no dependants.

The next hurdle for the trial, which has attracted at least 50 American doctors as volunteers, is to get the approval of the US Food and Drug Administration. If that is forthcoming, Dr Youle expects to be vaccinated within 12 months.

North-South poverty gap widens

DIFFERENCES in life expectancy are widening dramatically in Britain between the North and the South, the rich and the poor, a new study has shown.

A baby boy born in Cambridge in the early 1990s can expect to live almost seven years longer than his counterpart in Manchester, according to an analysis of mortality figures in England from 1984-94. Far from narrowing the health inequality gap between the haves and have-nots, the situation has worsened in time. Life expectancy in England varies by an average of 6.7 years for men and 4.7 years for women, and the gap has widened since 1986.

"Health inequalities are also widening between rich and poor countries and between the rich and poor within countries," said Veena Soni Raleigh, one of the researchers, from the National Institute of Epidemiology, at the University of Surrey, Guildford.

"It's important to recognise that poor health isn't just a question of getting a disease. It's a cumulative lifetime of disadvantage."

The growing regional difference is clearly seen by comparing death rates in district health authority areas. In the years from 1984-86 the difference between the highest and lowest life expectancy areas was 5.2 years for men and 4.3 for women. By 1992-94 the gap had stretched to 6.7 years for men, and 4.7 for women.

The gap between rich and poor has widened too. In the mid-1980s life expectancy in the most affluent areas exceeded that in the most deprived, which include inner London, by 2.8 years for men and 1.6 years for women. A decade later, these differences had increased to four years and 2.4 years respectively.

The findings were published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health. Dr Raleigh and Victor Kiri showed that since the 1980s people in Manchester have had the shortest life spans in England.

Men and women from the city had average life spans in the 1990s of 69.9 and 76.7 years. This compared with national average life spans of 74.1 and 79.5. In contrast men and women in the top life expectancy area, Cambridge, lived to 76.6 and 81.1 years.



Picture of enjoyment . . . An audience of children is captivated by the three-dimensional effects at one of Europe's most advanced cinemas in London's West End. The £6 million Trocadero cinema has a library of 150 action films which the audience watch wearing special headsets

Dome's deficit may fall to Lottery

Dan Glaister

THE Millennium Dome in Greenwich could cost the National Lottery millions of pounds more than budgeted, a report by a committee of MPs has revealed.

With £450 million of lottery money already committed to the project, the report expresses alarm that the lottery will be used as a fallback should the event's organisers not attract sufficient sponsorship or meet their target of 12 million visitors during the year-long celebration. Organisers hope to raise £150 million through sponsorship and £150 million from ticket sales and marketing.

The report from the culture, media and sport committee under Gerald Kaufman praised the dome as "magnificent in conception and likely to be breathtaking in execution". It expressed doubts about several aspects, however, including transport to the Greenwich site, the lack of sponsors, the content and the contingency plans.

"It would appear that the ultimate fallback plan is for the [operating] company to receive further lottery money," the report says. "The project appears to be underwritten by lottery funds."

The report also draws attention to a parliamentary answer given by Peter Mandelson, Minister without Portfolio and sole shareholder of the operating company, the New Millennium Experience Company. He said: "Should . . . commitments unavoidably increase we will take further steps to ensure — through the lottery — that the Millennium Commission is able to meet them."

The dome was initially granted £200 million of lottery money by the Millennium Commission. Last June that figure was increased to £450 million. With £150 million expected from sponsors, and £150 million from ticket revenue and other income, the total cost of the project will be at least £758 million.

The quotable quotes of 1997

ALAN CLARK and Tony Blair's teacher came top of the 100 most memorable quotes of 1997, *writes John Ezard.*

A list compiled by Oxford Quotations Dictionaries features Mr Blair's former English teacher, Eric Anderson, for one of the most genteelly despairing remarks of the year. Of the man who coined the phrase "New Labour, New Britain", Mr Anderson said: "I did spend a lot of time making sure his sentences always had verbs. I'm sorry to see he's slipped in recent years."

Mr Clark, the Conservative MP, gets in for a squib uttered at his adoption meeting in January. "I am never flamboyant on purpose. I am what I am."

Elizabeth Knowles, who compiled the the list, said: "It was a particularly good ego-maniac quote."

Mr Blair has three entries, including his words on achieving power: "We are not the masters. The people are the masters."

The Queen scores three times — including "please don't be too effusive" to Mr Blair at her wedding anniversary.

Novelist Martin Amis gets in with his description of his mid-life crisis: "You are living in a land you no longer recognise. You don't know the language."

The oldest entrant, in her 80s, is Britain's last living survivor of the Titanic, Millvina Dean. "I can't bear iced drinks — the iceberg, you know. Perhaps some champagne, though."

Norway hit by seaborne nuclear waste

Paul Brown

NORWAY has detected an eight-fold increase in radioactive waste reaching its shores in the last year as a result of discharges from the Sellafield nuclear plant in Cumbria, and is to renew demands for the closure of the plant responsible.

The disclosure that the radionuclide Technetium-99 (T-99) has travelled 500 miles on sea currents to the shores of Norway comes at an embarrassing time for the Government, which is considering an application for new discharge licences from the Sellafield plant.

In September last year Michael Meacher, the Environment Minister, at a meeting of ministers from 15 countries including Norway, pledged that the UK would end its sea discharges of nuclear waste and chemicals as soon as possible. It was to finally remove from Britain the tag of "the dirty man of Europe".

Thirteen of the countries present at the meeting of the Oslo/Paris Commission, which controls pollution in the North Sea, had expressed particular concern about T-99 because it accumulates in shellfish. Lobsters off Sellafield were caught in the summer by the Ministry of Agriculture (Maff) and found to be 32 times over the European Union safe limit for human consumption.

Per Strand, a member of the Norwegian Radiation Protection Board, said that after that Commission meeting in Brussels Norway had begun tests to see whether T-99 was reaching Norway. The board had since found an eightfold increase.

Mr Strand acknowledged that the levels of radioactivity were not dangerous to humans but that they could accumulate in shellfish.

Another meeting of the commission is due later this month. The Norwegian environment ministry said it would await a full report from the board before deciding how to frame its protest.

The cause of the problem is a plant opened in 1994 to process stored nuclear waste accumulated over many years. T-99 was not thought to be a problem at the time, and is routinely discharged into the sea. Maff monitoring found that levels in shellfish have more than doubled every year since then.

Diana in Angola: the princess's death revealed a more emotional Britain PHOTOGRAPH: JUDA NGWENYA

Power to the People

James Lewis

MANY YEARS hence, people will probably remember 1997 as the year which saw a change of government after 18 years of Tory rule, and the one in which the nation mourned the tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Both events certainly occupied an unprecedented acreage of newspaper space, though their significance may turn out to be less great than was supposed.

The defeat of John Major's administration in May, after a continuing and wearying saga of sleaze and infighting over Europe, came as no surprise. But even the new Prime Minister, Tony Blair, seemed taken aback by the scale of his victory, which is still misleadingly described as a "landslide".

A Commons majority of nearly 180 is certainly bullet-proof, but it came about only because of Britain's crazy electoral arithmetic. Labour's share of the vote was no greater than that of the Conservatives when they scraped into power five years earlier. So Labour has joined with the Liberal Democrats to consider various systems of proportional representation which could ensure more equitable results in future contests.

In the meantime many of Labour's policies, offering jam tomorrow, seem geared mainly towards winning a second term in office.

To prove to the electorate that he would not follow the tax-and-spend route of previous Labour administrations, Blair undertook to adhere to the tight spending limits imposed by the Tories. This has, in many cases, meant sticking to Tory policies as well — policies which Labour had vigorously attacked when in opposition. In government, "new" Labour adds a few refinements, gives the policies a new name, and hopes no one will notice.

But the once-acquiescent backbenchers, many of them new MPs, have started to notice. There was surprisingly little protest over a sweeping decision earlier in the year to charge university students up to £1,000 a year for tuition, but a plan to cut benefits for single parents in December provoked a minor rebellion. Blair's prolonged honeymoon seems to have ended, though most people remain convinced that he means well and really does care.

The focus is sharply on the centre: middle-class, middle-brow, middle-income, middling opinion middle Britain. To this electorate, the hyperactive Home Secretary, Jack Straw, offered a welter of policies. Handguns and knives were banned and paedophile registers created. There were schemes to speed up juvenile court hearings; curfews to keep young children off the streets after dark. And there are to be many more closed-circuit surveillance cameras on the streets and in public places — a prospect that caused unease to some civil libertarians.

Blair made no secret of his aim to re-brand Britain, no less, as a Cool Britannia to fit into what he calls a People's Europe in which he obviously hopes to become one of the big players when old fuddy-duddies such as Kohl and Chirac are gone.

There was much stunting in Downing Street: a kickabout with the Brazilian soccer star, Pele, as a smart way to publicise new Education Action Zones; inviting a group of kids into No 10 for the launch of plans for tackling global poverty.

Not everyone liked the extravaganza. Commonwealth heads of government — and, from all accounts, the Queen herself — were neither amused nor impressed by an all-singing, all-dancing video they were obliged to endure at the opening of their summit in Edinburgh.

Nor did all the stunts work. Claire Short, the minister responsible for overseas aid, was made to look distinctly silly when she was required to pretend, Diana-style, to be clearing mines from the beach at Brighton during Labour's annual conference. Ms Short simply does not look the type. Diana did at least do her pretending in Angola.

Cool Britannia, it now appears, will have no doorsteps. Those building the houses of the future must make them accessible to wheelchair-users. A fortune stands to be made by anyone who can invent a reliable device to prevent water from seeping under doors.

There were policies — on curfews, homework, noisy neighbours, workfare, tagging offenders, zero tolerance, gay servicemen, legal aid cuts, dissident Euro-MPs — which smacked of a government wielding the big stick. And the image of the bully was sometimes embodied in the manipulative manner of Blair's mouthpiece, Alastair Campbell, who became the sole conduit for his master's words and thoughts.

But far-reaching changes also lie ahead. Scotland voted by a large majority to have its own parliament, with extensive legislative powers. And Wales, with rather less enthusiasm, agreed to accept a devolved assembly which, though little more than a talking shop, will at least be a Welsh talking shop. Both will be up and running by the millennium.

LONDON, presently run by a hotch-potch of borough councils, is to have its own American-style elected mayor. The move was well received, and bets are already being taken on who will win the job. Richard Branson would be popular but is hardly likely to give up his many business interests. Other possibles are Lord (novelist Jeffrey) Archer, Ken Livingstone, the Labour leader of the former Greater London Council; and Michael Heseltine, the former deputy prime minister who dreamed up the idea in the first place.

The Tories, a bedraggled band under their youthful new leader, William Hague, made little impression as the official Opposition. Hague has taken his party further to the Eurosceptic right, ruling out a single European currency for the foreseeable future, and in the process neutering his two biggest hitters, the Europhile Heseltine and Kenneth Clarke.

The Liberal Democrats, now with 46 MPs, do little better. There are unworthy suspicions that the party's leader, Paddy Ashdown, is trying to keep his soldiers' swords sheathed until he and Blair can agree a package for electoral reform. The Prime Minister has promised to hold a referendum on a proportional system of voting from which the Lib-Dems, and other small parties, would undoubtedly benefit. So there is no great incentive to rock New Labour's boat.

The Prime Minister was the outright winner in the parade of self-regarding tributes to Diana, Princess of Wales, when she died in a Paris underpass in September. With broken voice and trembling lips, his overblown emotional display did him no end of good. Whether he knew it or not, by exploiting the powerful emotions that surrounded the image of Diana, and her own insistence on the importance of expressing emotions, he was recommending himself.

In calling her "the People's Princess", he precisely captured the public mood and, in the process, somehow laid claim to the People himself. Poor young/old William Hague, with a sincere but more formal, stiff-upper-lip tribute, was much castigated. So too was the Queen and the rest of her family who remained silent in their Scottish holiday hideaway, intending to emerge only for the funeral.

But the People were in full cry and were not to be denied. "Show us you care, Ma'am", shrieked the tabloids. So the monarch conceded to the news machines and paraded her unhappy grandsons to the curious gaze of the People in a London walkabout among great altars of flowers and cuddly toys which quickly reached astonishing proportions.

Millions of pounds are still pouring into the Diana Memorial Fund. But the former prime minister, John Major, appointed to guard the financial interests of her two sons, is acting to ensure that a share of any profits from the tacky marketing of the princess's image go to her two sons, the princes William and Harry.

The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh marked their 50th wedding anniversary and seemed to enjoy the celebrations, which coincided with the restoration of Windsor Castle after a disastrous fire two years ago.

But in other respects it was a humbling year for the monarchy. It lost the royal train (too costly to run) and the royal yacht (too costly to replace). Britannia will end her life as a tourist attraction, either in Manchester or in Leith.

The Queen is also opening her financial accounts to greater public scrutiny and slimming down the royal household by getting rid of minor courtiers with curious titles and obscure jobs, such as Gold Stick in Waiting. So, it is said, will the monarchy become closer to the People of Blair.

THE public "feel-good factor" which so eluded the hapless Major quickly returned soon after his electoral defeat. This owed less to politics than to billions of pounds in windfalls which poured into the laps of savers as building societies and insurance companies abandoned their mutual status and transformed themselves into banks and providers of financial services.

The unexpected cash kept retailers' tills ringing happily, financed foreign holidays, and indirectly helped house prices to resume a slow upward trend.

The inflationary effect of all this was contained by a series of small hikes in interest rates for which the Government can no longer be held to blame, since the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, handed over control of rates to the Bank of England within days of Labour's taking office.

Unemployment continued to fall. Most of the new jobs were created in the hotel, leisure and entertainment sector, though there was also growth in engineering and motor manufacturing.

As the year drew to a close, however, there was evidence of a significant cutback in the kind of inward investment which Britain has been enormously successful in attracting for the past five years and which has played a big part in bringing down the dole queues.

One possible explanation could be the strength of sterling, which has risen by 25 per cent against the Deutschmark over the year, and which will hurt any firm exporting from Britain. Another, more worrying, possibility is that Britain is beginning to suffer from its reluctance to join Europe's intended single currency.

The Blair government has confirmed that it will not join the first wave of the common European currency, which means that it will not do so in the lifetime of the present parliament. And it says precious little about when, and subject to which conditions, it would join.

But, regardless of the fact that most of the EU is moving ahead without him, Blair intends to make the most of Britain's presidency of the Community during the first six months of 1998. Since signing up to the Social Chapter, he has mounted a charm offensive designed to prove that Britain has become a team player now that the Tories are no longer calling the shots.

The obligatory logo has already been designed — by children, of course — to advertise the youthfulness and modernity of Cool Britannia. And there will be a six-month programme of promotional events from Orkney southwards "to address the anxieties of these most detached from the European dimension to British life". It promises to be a lively time.

The general election's defining moment came when Stephen Twigg for Labour overturned a massive majority in Enfield Southgate to oust Michael Portillo, darling of the Tory right PHOTO: KEVIN LAMARQUE

Court's moral message for the Socialists

EDITORIAL

ON DECEMBER 16, the final court of appeal in Paris confirmed an earlier ruling and stripped Henri Emmanuelli of his civic rights for two years. This means he will cease to be deputy and general councillor for the Landes *département*, and, because of a provision in France's electoral law, will not be allowed to run for political office for four years.

That was the chief punishment meted out to Emmanuelli in his capacity as national treasurer of the Socialist party (PS) at a time when it benefited from illegal financing, in other words before a 1990 law provided for electoral spending by political parties to be capped, controlled and partly funded by central government.

This legal sequel to the so-called Urba affair — Urba was a research consultancy set up by the PS at the beginning of the 1970s to organise the collection of fictitious commissions on public works undertaken by local authorities — has shocked not only those in Emmanuelli's party, but many other politicians.

They say that the sentence is unfair because it punishes a man not for illegal personal enrichment, but for actions taken in his party's service. They contend that since political parties compete for votes, according to the constitution, the methods they use to finance their activity must necessarily be legitimate, and that they should therefore be punished only if all the parties that have used such methods in the past are also sanctioned.

Since that last condition has not been fulfilled, Emmanuelli's punishment is, they argue, proof that the courts have been guilty of hounding one party, and even one man, to the exclusion of others.

These arguments contain two flaws. The first is that they fail to recognise that the ruling penalises not an individual misdemeanour but a collective violation of the law.

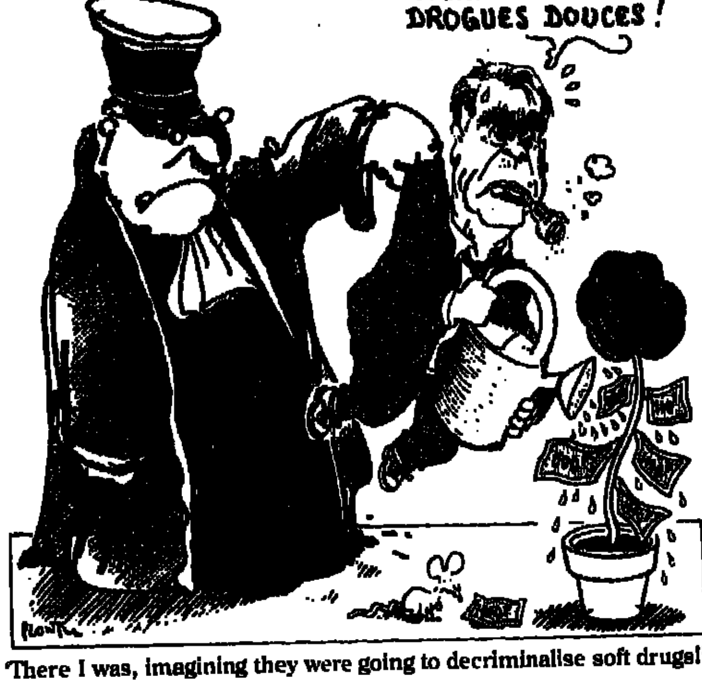
It is, in fact, the PS's system of financing that has been condemned through the person of Emmanuelli. The message of the ruling, which was handed down after appeals had been lodged by Emmanuelli, is that political parties and their leaders are no more entitled than any other legal entity or individual to break the law.

And the sentence passed on Emmanuelli, which strips him of the right to hold electoral office for four years, focuses on the very point at issue: democratic representation.

The second flaw in the argument put forward by Emmanuelli's supporters is that they persist in failing to understand that for the public at large equality before the law is the main guarantee of democracy. No one is entitled to exempt himself or herself from the law, and especially not those responsible for drafting and enforcing it.

If the Socialists, under their leader Lionel Jospin, do eventually decide to ask Jacques Chirac to exercise his presidential right to pardon Emmanuelli, they will be going against the republican sentiments on which they claim to have based their campaign of the past six months to moralise and modernise public life.

(December 18)



'There I was, imagining they were going to decriminalise soft drugs!'

Capital transfer fails to enthuse Kazakhs

Sophie Shihab in Moscow

THE "GRAND IDEA" of Nursultan Nazarbayev, which was sceptically received when he launched it three years ago, took concrete shape on December 10, when the Kazakhstan president officially inaugurated his new capital, Akmola. But no one knows if the actual transfer of the administration will take place as promised in June.

The inauguration ceremony had been postponed five times in recent months because work on the project had fallen behind. The transfer of the capital of this former Soviet republic represents a huge challenge.

The average monthly income per inhabitant is $35, barely higher than in the other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). And lengthy strikes by workers who had not been paid were broken up this autumn.

Meanwhile a luxurious presidential palace has just been completed in the "old" capital, Almaty, and a new palace is rising in Akmola alongside other prestigious buildings that are supposed to lend the trappings of a capital to an economically blighted provincial town in a remote corner of the icy steppes.

Akmola, which means "white tomb" in Kazakh, was a Cossack settlers' fort in the 19th century. It became a Soviet town, Tselinograd, at the end of the fifties, when Nikita Khrushchev decided to make it the focal point of his disastrous campaign to turn the "virgin steppes" into farmland.

Akmola's current population of 300,000 consists chiefly of unemployed Russian workers, some of them former gulag prisoners (there were many camps in the region) who are too poor to return to Russia.

Construction companies — local, Turkish and Italian — have been at work in Akmola for months. The façades of the ageing blocks of flats that line the town's main thoroughfare, which date from the Khrushchev era, have been given fresh coats of paint.

The large Soviet buildings around the central square have been refurbished, and a handful of new ones built. But the first wave of Kazakh civil servants "exiled" to the new capital live mostly in collective flats with local inhabitants or in hostels, which have been without gas for the past two years because of an economic crisis.

"We had no choice but to transform our centre of operations once our state started going through a period of transition, and Akmola meets the 32 criteria required for the choice of a capital," said Nazarbayev, who was accompanied to Akmola by all his ministers and members of parliament.

After having dissolved parliament twice, abolished the constitutional court, organised two referenda and brought the media and the opposition to heel, Nazarbayev is hardly likely to be contradicted. Nobody likes the choice of Akmola, but the decision to move there cannot be challenged.

It is rumoured in Almaty that the president has himself come to realise that it is a bad idea, but that he cannot backtrack without losing face.

A series of justifications for the transfer of the capital have been put forward. The first is a geostrategic one: only 40 per cent of Kazakhstan's 16 million inhabitants are Kazakhs, and another 40 per cent are Russians who live mostly in the northern, more industrialised half of the country. The transfer of the capital 1,000km to the north, towards the country's geographical centre, is seen as a guarantee against any separatist ambitions.

Still fresh in the Kazakhs' minds are the separatist calls made by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and enthusiastically echoed by Cossack activists in Kazakhstan until Nazarbayev silenced them.

Akmola, now that it is the capital, will attract to the north the Kazakhs who occupy almost all the country's administrative and government jobs. The Kazakhs in the region will slowly but surely outnumber the Russians.

The risk of earthquakes in Almaty, which lies at the foot of mountains near the country's southern border, is another reason given for the transfer.

A third reason has to do with the traditional division of Kazakhs into three groups called *juz*, a word that in Genghis Khan's day was translated in the West as "hordes": there is a "big" juz, which is the most influential and forms a majority in the south, a "medium-sized" juz a little further to the north, and a "small" juz centred in the oil-rich west. It is believed that Nazarbayev's aim in creating his own capital was to end rivalries between the three groups.

It could also be that he was responding to the ancestral urge of a nomad who is ever searching for new pastures — an explanation that does not feature among the 32 official reasons for the transfer.

The main reason for the transfer cited by the president on December 10 was that since Kazakhstan was a "Eurasian" country, its capital should be Akmola — "one of the geographical centres of Eurasia, and a future important centre of communications on this supercontinent, where economic, technological and data-processing flows will come together in the 21st century".

Meanwhile Nazarbayev has signed a decree setting up a "support fund for low-income citizens", and announced that the first donations will consist of a month's salary from the president, his ministers and members of parliament.

A comparable system was set up for the building of Akmola, whose funding comes, in theory, from "non-budgetary" sources. The foreign companies that have flocked to Kazakhstan in the hope of an oil boom have been asked to contribute — in return for tax breaks.

Although they grumble about corruption, those firms have been more eager to accept that obligation than foreign embassies have been to move to the plots of arid steppe that they have been allocated in the new capital.

(December 12)

Mixed signals ferried across the Channel

Denis Hautin-Guiraut

THE main finding to emerge from an opinion poll organised by Sofres for Le Monde and the television programme La Marche du Siècle is that the French have a favourable view of the British, while the latter feel rather remote from, if not indifferent to, their neighbours across the Channel.

According to the poll, in which 1,000 representative members of the population aged 18 or over were questioned, 50 per cent of French "rather liked" the British, while only 35 per cent of the latter reciprocated, with 20 per cent admitting to feeling "antipathy" towards them. The percentage of French who felt antipathy towards the British was 13 per cent.

In France the people with the warmest feelings towards Britain were women (53 per cent), young people (50-54 per cent in the 18-49 age bracket), shopkeepers, artisans, industrialists, managers and workers, while farmers were more mistrustful with only 31 per cent.

The British chiefly saw the French as "educated" (43 per cent), "creative" (19 per cent), and "likeable and welcoming" (19 per cent). But, paradoxically, they did not regard them as particularly "resourceful" (8 per cent), "funny" (7 per cent), "honest" (7 per cent), or "courageous" (4 per cent).

What the British did not like about the French was that they were "arrogant" (37 per cent), "cool and stand-offish" (25 per cent), "obstinate" (16 per cent), "talkative" (17 per cent) and "tight-fisted and hypocritical" (10 per cent).

The most typical aspects of France were its attractive lifestyle (good food, luxury products, wine, haute couture) for 70 per cent of Britons, its culture (ancient monuments, literature, painting) for 47 per cent, and its history (the Crusades, the Revolution, Gaullism) for 36 per cent — but certainly not France's position as the world's fifth-largest economic power (8 per cent).

As for the French, 46 per cent approved of English customs (tea, the monarchy, pubs), and 32 per cent of Britain's economic prosperity and low unemployment rate. Very few (10 per cent) paid tribute to Britain's technological achievements.

But no more Britons were prepared to consider the possibility of moving to Paris (17 per cent) than French were to London (18 per cent). And even if 68 per cent of Britons thought the tunnel under the Channel was "a good thing", 48 per cent of them were "not in favour" or "not very much in favour" of Britain adopting a single currency; 34 per cent were "in favour" or "rather in favour" of such a move.

But it was in the political sphere that reactions differed most. While 82 per cent of French had a "high" or "rather high" opinion of the Labour prime minister, Tony Blair, only 11 per cent of Britons had the same opinion of his French Socialist counterpart, Lionel Jospin, while 82 per cent said they had no opinion on the subject.

That indifference was tempered by some support for the social policies pursued by the French Socialists: 55 per cent of Britons believed it would be possible to introduce a reduction of the working week to 35 hours in the UK, and 30 per cent thought that workers' rights were better protected in France than in Britain.

(December 17)

Moved to delight by the melody

Jean-Michel Frodon reviews Alain Resnais' latest film and, below, his actors discuss why they like working with him

I CAN recommend Alain Resnais' 15th feature, On Connaît la Chanson, as a very effective pick-me-up if you are feeling a bit down. To quote just one hilarious scene, Resnais has an estate agent, played by André Dussolier, imagining himself in republican guard uniform, riding a horse and singing Alain Bashung's Vertiges de l'Amour with Bashung's own voice in playback.

Throughout the movie — in which the characters regularly break into well-known popular songs by singers ranging from the pre-war Ouvrard to Johnny Hallyday, Dalida and Michel Jonasz — Resnais' aim is not to "entertain" in a low-brow sense, but to poke sophisticated fun at the way we all tell ourselves stories in order to make life a little more livable.

Telling stories without prejudging whether they are "true" or "false" has been Resnais' job for the past 45 years. With his long experience of how to bring a character, story or imagined event to life, he has acquired an incomparable narrative virtuosity. It is this exhilarating lightness of touch, rather than his repeated recourse to popular songs, that brings to mind parallels with musical comedy.

Despite its virtuosity and lightness of touch, not everything is sweetness and light in On Connait la Chanson. As though to warn the spectator from the start not to adopt too casual an approach to the film, Resnais starts by contrasting Sabine Azéma's chirpy voice with an image of a swastika — a tiny moment of reconstitution that takes us on a leap through time and into the realm of fiction.

With a characteristic sense of narrative, which intertwines the stories of seven main characters, each of whom is precisely drawn, interesting, moving and, in their own way, funny, Resnais interprets a screenplay by Agnès Jaoui and Jean-Pierre Bacri with the same delicate subtlety that he used when working from scenarios by Marguerite Duras (Hiroshima Mon Amour), Alain Robbe-Grillet (L'Année Dernière à Marienbad), Jean Cayrol (Muriel) and Jorge Semprun (La Guerre Est Finie).

As the film moves from the streets of Paris to flats for sale, interchanging feelings, discourses and decors, we sense the importance Resnais attaches to chance, a "force of proposition" that opens on to fictional possibilities.

He once again gives us his thoughts on appearances, whether real or illusory, finding a new angle to the question through his subtle use of popular songs. Not only are the songs immediately appealing to the spectator, but they make it possible to express, more quickly and with greater resonance, such sentiments as "I love you", "Don't leave me" or "I feel lonely and unhappy".

Resnais demonstrates the power and limitations of cliché, the accuracy and superficiality of lyrics, and the ambivalent quality of hackneyed songs which both express and encapsulate our most personal feelings, past, present and future.

The great merit of his film is to accept such "vulgarity" on its own terms, without a hint of condescension, while at the same time criticising such an easily consoling and blinkering view of human behaviour — as when a picture of personal happiness looks like an ad for a chicory beverage.

Resnais: narrative virtuosity

But Resnais is all too aware of the dangers of virtuosity without a conscience. His whole exercise is shot through with an anxious self-discipline, which makes the film look rather like Montaigne adapted by Vincente Minnelli.

The film's narrative fluency, which never lapses into self-indulgence, lends a wonderful freedom to the *mise-en-scène* of a director once admired for his superbly discreet camera movements. That ease is never more evident than in the final sequence, which brings all the characters together in a pot-pourri where the real and the artificial, the internal and the external, and the burlesque and the tragic stop being formal binomials and become instead infinite variations on life itself.

With the apotheosis of his closing sequence, Resnais harks back to the finale of his I Want To Go Home, a film which left one in a state of unease, and which is mirrored by On Connaît la Chanson. The feeling of well-being is generated here by the precision of the script's construction, the communicative elation of the actors, and the carefully shaded range of shapes, colours and lights.

Behind the film's whirling *mise-en-scène*, it is the nature of truth that is called into question — as it was in Hiroshima and Algeria (Muriel was already a very special kind of musical comedy), or through the triple persona of Stavisky, or under Professor Henri Laborit's psychomotor microscope in Mon Oncle d'Amérique.

On Connait la Chanson is about telling oneself stories, about the essence of truth and how individuals and society react to it.

Three actors in search of a director

Cast and screenwriting team from On Connaît la Chanson . . . from left, Pierre Arditi, Agnès Jaoui, Lambert Wilson, André Dussollier, Sabine Azéma and Jean-Pierre Bacri

ANDRÉ DUSSOLLIER

RESNAIS offered me a small part in Stavisky in the mid-seventies, but unfortunately I had other commitments. When another offer came up for La Vie Est un Roman, I naturally leapt at the chance, even though it was a virtually mute part. I also got the role partly at Fanny Ardant's suggestion.

To give you just one example of Resnais' perfectionism, I remember a scene in the film where there was a crowd shot filmed from a balcony. He had given the extras a sheet of paper which listed some of the major events of 1920, so the crowd would have something to talk about and the sound engineer could pick up snatches of conversation that were in keeping with the period.

Resnais also does a lot of preparing. He gets the actors to read the screenplay and meets each of us alone, so we are free to bring up anything that comes into our head. Rehearsals mostly take place in settings and conditions similar to those on set, so when shooting begins, much of the spadework has already been done. One is on familiar territory, the structure has been established, and one has much more freedom in one's acting.

With each new film I always pay very close attention to Resnais' direction — it's absolutely original each time. He does nothing you expect him to do. Resnais is someone who is interested in everything and is enormously curious about things. It's also one of his characteristics as a director: he has an ability to surprise and disconcert, and to keep the spectator constantly interested.

The idea of putting songs in the movie was exciting, but not easy for the actor. One was tempted, once the song had got going, to take the mike and turn into Johnny Hallyday. At the same time, of course, there was a kind of childish exhilaration about it all. I've already seen the film three or four times, and I think the device, which seems incongruous at first sight, works very well.

On Connaît la Chanson is also very much a film of its time, a rather eloquent picture of our uneasy age, where we lie to ourselves and to others in a society that requires us to put on a show of brash self-confidence.

SABINE AZÉMA

THERE are two versions of how I came to meet Resnais. I personally think he saw my name on a poster and liked the way it sounded. He, on the other hand, claims he got in touch with me because he'd seen me blush on screen. You can choose whichever version you prefer.

I was working at the Lycée Carnot when, on the advice of a friend, I went to see Muriel, which had been revived. At the time I didn't yet know I wanted to become an actress. The cinema wasn't even something I was all that interested in. I can truly say Muriel was my first big cinematic revelation. I was so overwhelmed I saw all Resnais' other films afterwards.

I couldn't say which of those movies left the greatest impression on me, though the first one I shot with him, La Vie Est un Roman, changed the course of my career — and my life too, because after appearing in it I was no longer the young girl I had been.

But they all greatly impressed me, because Resnais is a very great poet who manages to move us with each new film. He tries to understand life in all its forms and from a new angle each time. He reveals things about the mystery of the world, and also about death, which lurks in all his movies.

The way he works varies from film to film, but usually we see one another well before shooting, we go out together, we go shopping, we listen to music, we talk and we exchange ideas about the part.

Alain is someone who asks actors for their opinion. As well as the screenplay, we read other works by its author. In other words, we fill out the part. It begins to get under our skin.

Then comes the shooting. He's a director who takes decisions swiftly. He's very clear and doesn't put you into a tizzy with a lot of useless chatter. He's also capable of great affection, not just for his actors but for the crew as a whole. Everyone is treated equally. And he also tries to surprise you.

The singing of songs, which is the idea the screenplay is based on, was very exhilarating during the shooting of On Connaît la Chanson. I see the film as being rather like the songs it contains — something light and untragic, with everyday characters who are sublimated by the *mise-en-scène*, and who all of a sudden take on a metaphysical dimension.

PIERRE ARDITI

I MET Resnais 17 years ago under rather curious circumstances. I happened to be in a shoe shop with my partner and Resnais' partner, who had come shopping with her. It took my partner two hours to make up her mind, and it was my very great patience that struck her friend and prompted her to persuade Resnais to go and see a play I was appearing in at the time. That's how I got offered a part in Mon Oncle d'Amérique.

But I had long been familiar with his work as a viewer — I saw L'Année Dernière à Marienbad when I was 17. He was already the French film-maker who most fascinated me at the time.

I was all the more surprised, when I started to work regularly with Resnais, to discover that behind the director whose reputation is associated with a certain intellectual austerity there lay someone completely different — someone funny and young in spirit, who thoroughly enjoyed life.

Resnais — I can say this because I know a bit about his personal life — was never allowed to be a child. So he's sort of made up for that, to an extent where it seems to me that all the young French film-makers of the new generation are older than him.

I think his whole *oeuvre* is a forced march towards childhood. That doesn't stop him being extraordinarily perfectionist and respectful towards actors when he's in a working environment.

Like many of his recent films, On Connaît la Chanson is about appearances. I myself think it's an utterly tragic film. I emerged from the preview saying to myself I'd just seen something quite horrible.

But the Resnais film that left the greatest impression on me as an actor was L'Amour à Mort, which was an extraordinary human experience for me. Since that movie, I've been a man who can weep. And then of course there's Mélo, which is an extraordinary gift for an actor.

What most strikes me about Resnais, and what I'm grateful to him for, is that he has always regarded me as a rare and precious object. That's why, if he asked me to do a walk-on part in one of his films, I'd gladly accept.

Interviews by Jacques Mandelbaum

Le Monde
Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

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"promiscuous" overloading of meanings on terms like "hot and cold media" — McLuhan refuses to fade, and in the '90s he is experiencing a revival among students of the ...ingly pervasive digital ...han's insistence that ...edia bath and ...etting

Australians Close Eyes to Openness

Kevin Sullivan in Cabramatta

DANH NGOC PHUNG fled her native Vietnam by boat 20 years ago and eventually found her way to this busy suburb south of Sydney, where she opened a pharmacy and raised six children.

Now 65, she is a classic immigrant success story: She owns two pharmacies; two of her children are pharmacists, one is an architect, and three own small businesses. "It's been good for us here," she said.

Far too good for some Australians, who wish she would just go home. Phung and other Asian immigrants are keenly aware that they are in the cross hairs of this country's divisive debate about race relations, immigration and the identity of a mainly European nation at the far end of Asia.

"I'm scared sometimes," Phung said, noting an increase in verbal and physical abuse of Asians in the last year. "But there's nothing I can do about it except remind my children not to go out at night — it's dangerous."

Since World War II, Australia has grown from a land of 7 million people of almost purely British and Irish descent into a multihued melting pot of 18 million people, almost a quarter of them born overseas. The transition generally has been smooth, unmarked by the sporadic violence toward immigrants in parts of Europe and the United States. But with unemployment now hovering around 9 percent, some native-born Australians are convinced that immigrants are taking away their jobs and destroying their traditional way of life.

The government's "White Australia" immigration policy, which officially ended in 1973, required immigrants to be of European descent. Since then, Australia rapidly has become a society of immigrants from 150 nations in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, the former Soviet states and many Asian nations.

Last year, almost 100,000 newcomers settled here, more than half of them from Asian countries and Pacific islands. Sydney has an ever-growing Chinatown, and outside the United States, Australia has the world's largest community of overseas Vietnamese, about 200,000 people.

Australia's changing makeup has been welcomed by many who see a new richness in the nation's culture, food and lifestyle. But some people feel uneasy watching comfortable old traditions such as cold ale and hot meat pies being replaced by Singha beer from Thailand and Vietnamese pho soup.

It's 10,000 miles from Sydney to London, Australia's former colonial capital, and the distance has never seemed greater. Cultural and personal relations have thinned between Britain and its former colony, as it has vigorously fostered links with its Asian neighbors. About 75 percent of Australia's exports now go to Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China and other Asian nations.

Sensing its changing place in the world, Australia has chosen a decidedly more Asian tack in its economic and foreign policy. In terms of trade and security, Australia now pays closer attention to its 200 million neighbors in Indonesia than to its 3 million English-speaking cousins in New Zealand.

The changes have affected nearly everyone here, from the rising number of scholarships and slots at public universities won by Asian students, to Chinese spoken on the streets of Sydney, to the ornate Balinese hardwood furniture that fills store windows.

But for some Australians, an increasingly vocal force, the changes seem a direct threat to their security and their children's future.

So when blunt-talking Pauline Hanson, a fish-and-chips shop owner, was elected to the federal Parliament in 1996, she was like lightning striking a parched forest. The ultraconservative Hanson's maiden speech in Parliament was an angry screed against immigration.

"I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians," she said. "They have their own culture and religion, they form ghettos, and they do not assimilate."

Australia's growth into a multicultural melting pot generally has been smooth, but there is now a divisive debate about race relations and immigration PHOTOGRAPH FRANK BARON

When Hanson started her One Nation political party, which claimed that Australia might soon be run by "multiracial lesbians," thousands of people turned out for rallies.

More angry than articulate, Hanson predictably drew support from extreme right-wingers, from biker gangs to groups linked to the Ku Klux Klan. But what startled most observers here was the hidden middle-class rage that Hanson seemed to have tapped. It was a kind of anger comparable in some ways to the paranoia that has fueled the American militia movement. Hanson says Australia is being run by a "bunch of academic snobs" who "wouldn't know what a hard damn day's work is like." She worries that the United Nations is trying to take over the world.

"She gives a lot of unhappy people someone to kick," said Phillip Adams, a prominent columnist and radio talk show host in Sydney.

"They're signing up with Pauline because their kids don't do what they tell them, because they've got weight problems, because their husband or wife doesn't love them anymore," Adams said. "They're there because other people seem smarter or prettier or richer than they are . . . We're looking at problems that require therapy rather than legislation."

Analysts here say Hanson's popularity has peaked, and polls indicate it is now around 4 percent. Hanson still travels with bodyguards and rarely gives media interviews. There have been threats of violence toward her, and there also has been an increase in abuse of Asians, largely attributed to the anti-foreigner feeling whipped up by Hanson's supporters.

Many Australians are clearly embarrassed. They fear Hanson has set back the race debate by 40 years. Many here say Prime Minister John Howard is manipulating the immigration debate for political gain. It took Howard eight months to disavow Hanson's original speech in Parliament. Even then it was carefully qualified criticism, intended apparently not to offend Hanson's supporters. "It would be a serious mistake," Howard said, "to attack those who are attracted to her as bigoted, narrow-minded and racist. A few no doubt are. Most, however, are not."

Many political analysts fear Howard may further divide the nation along racial lines by not fully denouncing Hanson's positions on the Aborigines, who inhabited Australia before white settlers arrived. She said "red-blooded Australians" were "fed up to the back teeth" with social welfare programs designed to correct two centuries of discrimination against the Aborigines.

Polls here show that support for immigration is at an all-time low, mainly because people here believe that it costs jobs. Howard has responded to that sentiment, cutting next year's immigration quota by 8 percent, or a total of 20 percent since he took office in 1996, claiming that "there is a link between high unemployment and high immigration."

Most economic analysts disagree. They say many immigrants today tend to be creative entrepreneurs who start businesses and create jobs in places like Cabramatta.

Clare Khanh Dinhvu, who came to Australia two decades ago as a refugee from Vietnam and is now an optometrist with her own shop in Cabramatta, says she thinks Australia is "more racist now than it was 20 years ago. Right now we're the scapegoat, it's our turn," she said. "Twenty years down the road, it will be somebody else's turn."

Canada Reassesses Role of Its Senate

Howard Schneider in Toronto

WHEN it was established along with the rest of the country in 1867, the Canadian Senate was designed as a hybrid between Britain's hereditary House of Lords and the equal state representation provided by the U.S. Congress's upper chamber. Appointed to their posts for life, members had to own property and were expected to balance the populist House of Commons with the "sober second thought" befitting landed nobility. Or, as Cicero put it in a phrase hung on the Senate wall, "to oppose the fickleness of the multitudes."

These days, however, it isn't just Canada's 104 senators who are having second thoughts.

"It was meant to be something between the House of Lords and the American elected Senate — a kind of Canadian compromise," said University of Toronto historian Michael Bliss. "The result is that it worked better than neither . . . The dilemma is that we cannot figure out how to change it."

"It's the Valhalla of fallen political warriors," said Rob Anders, a Reform Party member of Parliament. "Although I am not sure that is appropriate because to go to Valhalla you have to have an amount of honor."

The current anxiety focuses on Andrew Thompson, an Ontario politician and former House of Commons member named to the Senate by then-Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson in the 1960s.

The Senate did not keep attendance records then. But in recent years, after the public and media decided even honorable men need watching, it became apparent Thompson and a good many others did their sober thinking elsewhere.

According to reviews of Senate records published in several Canadian papers recently, Thompson attended less than 3 percent of sessions over the past decade. He continues to draw approximately $60,000 annual salary but spends much of the year in La Paz, Mexico. During rare appearances, he signed papers saying he was still conducting Senate business and offered a medical excuse for his absence — documents required to keep paychecks flowing. Canadian journalists tracked Thompson down, and pictures started trickling back of his substantial villa and leisurely walks in the sun.

In November, Prime Minister Jean Chretien booted him from the Liberal caucus. Now his colleagues have voted to strip him of his office space, research expenses and a secretary's salary until he begins showing up for work. None of that affects his membership; that can't be revoked. He must retire in two years when he turns 75 — a 1960s change from lifetime appointments — but until then he is untouchable.

According to Senate records published recently by the Globe and Mail daily newspaper, about a quarter of Canada's senators missed at least 40 percent of the chamber's sessions. Attendance rules currently excuse senators for virtually any reason — from corporate board meetings to charitable functions.

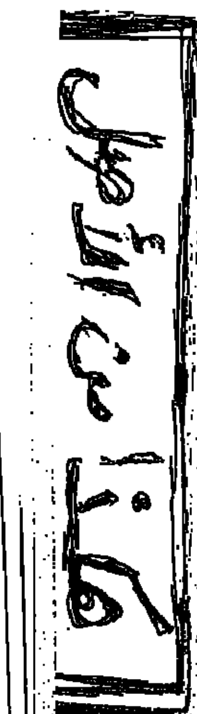
Conservative Ontario Sen. Marjory LeBreton and three others have been appointed to a special committee to study how the Senate can police itself more effectively. "It flies in the face of everything that is good and decent," LeBreton said.

Designed around a rough regional apportionment for how Canada looked 130 years ago, the Senate now gives neither regional balance, nor equal province-by-province apportionment that might protect smaller jurisdictions. The huge Western provinces combined have 24 senators — the same as the three tiny Atlantic jurisdictions of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

As with the U.S. Senate, it ostensibly has the power to initiate legislation, amend laws the other chamber has passed and kill bills it does not like. But it rarely exercises that authority, mindful of its appointed status.

No reform suggestions have taken hold; most proposals would require Quebec to give up some representation, a sensitive issue with French-speaking separatists already feeling they get a raw deal.

The result is each senator is left to decide whether to become an activist legislator, a regional defender, a ceremonial figurehead or a business executive with a nice income and public pension on the side.



Genetic seeds of hope – or despair

Is genetic engineering about to revolutionise the world? Two experts in biotechnology agree to differ

THE CASE FOR

Bernard Dixon

WE SHALL not be far into the next millennium before we realise that much of the current angst over genetically modified food was unnecessary. If research and development are allowed to continue, the products will be there for all to appreciate.

New varieties of rice and other crops, resistant to insects and disease, will have replaced those cultivated today. Farmers will no longer lose substantial proportions of their harvests. The impact of these advances will be felt in less developed countries.

Health benefits will also come from plants genetically engineered to be more balanced nutritionally than those that have evolved through natural selection or been bred by traditional methods.

The potential medical spin-offs from plant biotechnology are considerable. A new generation of more potent vaccines, many against illnesses for which no vaccines have been available, will be grown in plants such as maize and bananas.

Malnutrition could be banished. Biotechnology can improve efficiency of food production and generate more nourishing crops.

Throughout the world, gardeners, vegetarians and consumers will benefit from plant varieties resistant to spoilage, foods which reduce our dependence on animals, and cheaper and/or tastier products.

We should not, however, overlook potential hazards in altering our diet by genetic engineering. As with all other applications of science to human welfare, biotechnology is likely to have risks. Mistakes will probably be made.

Nevertheless any analysis of the new techniques for ferrying genes between plants must surely conclude that they are being applied and controlled more stringently than any technology ever before.

Nearly 25 years ago, when scientists first learned to combine DNA from different sources, commentators warned of the iniquity of "opening Pandora's box". Among their horrific forecasts were unstoppable epidemics and worldwide pestilences. None of these has come to pass, partly because genetic manipulation has not proved inherently dangerous.

In addition, regulatory committees (many with public representation) have been set up to ensure that experiments are conducted in appropriately safe conditions.

The regulators' task is not simply to allow research to go ahead unless potential hazards are obvious. It is to consider risks that could come to light later. Will a gene, introduced into rape to protect it against virus attack, also make the pollen grains more likely to cause hay fever? All proposals have to survive positive vetting of this sort before they are sanctioned.

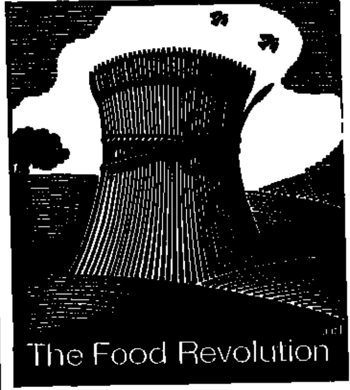
Genetic engineering is far more precise — and thus predictable — than the gene movements which occur in nature. When plants fertilise and cross-fertilise in the wild, large numbers of genes are transferred in a haphazard fashion.

Biotechnology allows individual genes to be moved with precision from one plant to another. It is much easier to know how one gene will work in its new setting. The likelihood of unexpected consequences, and the margin of error, are correspondingly reduced.

There is a chance, however remote, that a gene introduced into a particular plant at one time and location might have adverse consequences if it eventually gets into to another plant distant in space and time.

Given the astronomical amount of random gene transfer which occurs throughout the biosphere, such extreme caution is unwarranted. I believe most food producers — and eaters — would agree.

Dr Bernard Dixon is a member of the European Federation for Biotechnology's task group on public perception and editor of the journal Medical Science Research



THE CASE AGAINST

Vandana Shiva

THE problems with the genetic revolution developed 25 years ago, when molecular biologists evolved the tools of genetic engineering in labs, working with organisms designed not to survive in an open environment.

Today, long before the science of molecular biology has matured, global corporations have rushed to the market, applying the tools of genetic engineering to whole systems of agriculture and food production.

Genetically engineered crops and foods are already being launched by big companies bent on taking over agriculture. Profits are being privatised by patenting seeds, and safety concerns are not being addressed in the industry's drive for profits.

The industry, which is speeding an immature technology on to the market, operates double standards. It declares an organism "novel" when it wants to claim it as property, and as "natural" when it wants to avoid the responsibility of risk.

Commercial applications of genetic engineering are a large scale experiment being carried out on nature and people. Risks associated with laboratory experiments do not provide proper lessons for safety of commercial use of genetically engineered organisms designed to survive in the environment. The risk of genetic engineering in agriculture has to be assessed in the context of its use on a huge commercial scale.

The commercial growing of genetically engineered crops and micro-organisms has only just begun. We cannot justify taking the results of small-scale experiments in laboratories and extend those to complex ecosystems. Field tests for safety and risk assessment only look at the plants and are not designed to look at what happens to surrounding environments where commercial crops may be grown.

Genetic engineering is not a precise science. It is a highly uncertain technology. The ability to move individual genes is not equivalent to knowing how the transgenic organism will behave. Gene transfers lead to unpredictable outcomes because plants and organisms are continuously changing.

One micro-organism, *Klepsiella planticola*, which was recently genetically engineered to digest agricultural waste and convert it to ethanol, was found to destroy crops and soil, fauna and flora, thus threatening the very basis of agriculture instead of providing a solution to disposal of agriculture bioproducts.

Genetic engineering threatens to destroy millions of peasant livelihoods in the Third World. Tropical crops such as sugar cane, coconut, vanilla and cocoa can be grown anywhere with genetic engineering. Whole industries in developing countries may disappear.

The most popular argument used by the biotechnology industry is that without its genetic engineering the world will starve. The industry promises an increase in crop yields of 10 to 15 per cent, but data shows that small farms which base their agriculture on many different sorts of farming can be five or 10 times more productive per unit than large monocultural farms. Land reform is a safer and more equitable route to food security.

Dr Vandana Shiva is director of the Institute of Science, Technology and Ecology in Delhi



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Cuba prepares for a clash of the titans

Under John Paul II, the Catholic Church did its best to undermine communism in eastern Europe. Now the Pope is heading for Cuba. Will the visit mark the beginning of the end for Fidel Castro, asks **Jonathan Steele**, or the limit of the Vatican's political influence?

EACH is tough as a nut, incredibly stubborn and, at 70-something, still a charismatic actor on his chosen stage.

So when Fidel Castro and Pope John Paul II meet in Havana in late January, the world will watch the bout with fascination.

Some wonder whether it will turn into a love affair between two unlikely old men — after all, they have much in common as they try to hold their authoritarian structures together in the face of a loss of faith.

Others are looking for a thrilling battle of moral one-upmanship from two elaborately polite but uncompromising representatives of very different ideologies. Then there are those who see it as the thin end of the political wedge that will finally prise Castro's grip from Cuba, a chance for crowds to gather with impunity and shout regime-toppling slogans in a kind of Caribbean replay of eastern Europe's 1989.

As interest in Pope John Paul II's forthcoming visit mounts, so do the scenarios and the speculation. Cuba is the only country in Latin America to which the Pope has not yet been, and more journalists have applied to cover his journey there than went with him on his first trip to a communist country, his native Poland, in 1979.

On the island itself, the drumbeat has been gathering strength for weeks. "John Paul, we're waiting," proclaimed a banner strung across the front of the white-washed basilica in Bejucal, a small town near the capital, as Cardinal Jaime Ortega, the Archbishop of Havana, arrived on a recent Sunday morning for one of the series of masses he is conducting in local churches to prime the faithful. Worshippers crowded the building, but the loudspeakers set up in the forecourt for the expected overflow were playing to only a few dozen people.

Many seemed to have come out of curiosity, and could only mumble the responses as the cardinal went through the service.

Their voices took wing only when, in an odd shift, he led the chanting in the familiar style of a political rally: "Viva Cuba. Viva the Image of Mary. Viva el Papa." Then he urged the congregation to be ready to get on their bicycles, go on foot, or take the bus to central Havana when the Pope comes.

The Pope's message would be simple, the cardinal explained. "Don't be afraid. Open yourselves to Christ. Open your hearts and the doors of your structures to Christ."

He did not explain what he meant by structures, but it sounded like a barely-veiled call for political pluralism.

Listening near the church's open front doors, Maria Hernandez reflected Cuba's contradictions. A retired teacher, she wore a black T-shirt with the image of Che Guevara on the front. "I am a believer, though my husband is not. He belongs to the Communist party," she said. "The Pope will bring peace and tranquillity. We have great faith in his visit here. We expect an improvement in everything."



Fidel Castro shakes hands with Pope John Paul II during their historic meeting at the Vatican, on November 19 PHOTO: VATICAN POOL

Five minutes' walk away, men were drinking rum at an outdoor bar in the main square, oblivious to the cardinal's mass. The small Sunday-morning market had been forced to move, and a farmer had laid out the carcass of a pig on a park bench under the palm trees. A young black man, leaning against a wooden balcony with his girlfriend, said he had been to the church to watch the statue of the Virgin being carried in. "It's sympathetic, very interesting," he said. He was a member of the Young Communist League. "The Church helps people a lot. It helps transport sick people to hospital, and gives clothes and shoes to the poor."

A few years ago, such comments would have been taboo. The Catholic hierarchy fell out with the revolution when Castro took power in 1959, and for almost 20 years church-state relations were frozen in a kind of cold war. But Catholicism was never as well-implanted even before the revolution as it was in the Pope's native Poland. More than half the island's 800 priests were Spanish. Many were sympathetic to the fascist Franco regime. Few villages had churches, and most Cubans rarely went to mass. The Catholics exerted their influence through the school system more than through church worship. Among black Cubans, in particular, the practice of *santeria* — a mixture of Christian, Yoruba and ancestor worship — was strong.

The child of a land-owner, Fidel Castro had a typical religious background. Although his mother was a devout woman who said her daily prayers, he was baptised only at the age of five. "People who were not baptised were called Jews. At that age I understood it was meant to be something bad, but did not know what," he told an interviewer some years ago. He went to a series of fee-paying church schools, then became a boarder in a Jesuit college, where most of the staff and pupils were white, rich and right wing. Castro says he never believed in God, though he sometimes wore a small medallion of the Virgin of Copper, Cuba's national icon, during the guerrilla struggle.

Many priests left Cuba when the revolutionaries came to power; others did not have their visas renewed. Three priests joined the exile forces organised by the CIA to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. It was not until the late seventies that Castro began to warm to the Church, partly thanks to the Vatican's condemnation of the American embargo.

In 1979, he invited the Pope — then only three months in office — to stop in Cuba on his way back from Mexico. Also invited by Cuban exiles to visit Miami, the Pope solved the dilemma by stopping in the Bahamas instead, a decision that "did not please us or dispose us to renew the invitation soon", Castro later explained.

Publicly, Castro was always respectful of religion in general. He gave a long series of interviews in 1985 to Frei Betto, a Dominican monk from Brazil who was one of the leading proponents of liberation theology and the so-called "option for the poor".

The Pope and his conservative advisers had strongly criticised Betto and similar worker-priests for dabbling in Marxism.

Castro argued, in his conversation with Betto, that there was no conflict. "You can be a Marxist without ceasing to be a Christian. The important thing is that, in both cases, we are talking of sincere revolutionaries who want to end the exploitation of man by man, and fight for a just distribution of social wealth, for equality, fraternity, and human dignity," he said. Challenged on Marx's phrase that religion is the opium of the people, Castro said it had to be put in its historical context. There were times and places where a ruling class had used religion to divert people away from demanding social change, just as the first European missionaries in Latin America had used religion to justify conquest and slavery. "Religion can be an opium or a marvellous cure insofar as it used to defend the oppressors or the oppressed."

AS COMMUNISM was collapsing in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, Castro began to soften the Cuban Communist party's stance on religion. Membership rules were changed to allow believers to join the party. Under the impression that the government had its back to the wall, the Catholic bishops produced a political challenge in September 1983. In a long statement, they called on Castro to launch a "national dialogue". It had to be "a dialogue with free, responsible interlocutors and not with people whose words are known to us before they speak", they said. "If Cuba has opened the frontiers of international relations with systems that are not just different from but opposed to our own, it is not clear why Cubans must be uniform in the national context."

Although the bishops' move was fiercely denounced in the official press, Castro continued to take unilateral steps towards easing the situation of all the island's churches, the Baptists, the charismatic fundamentalist sects and the Catholics: foreign missionaries got visas; Bibles and other religious books could be imported; and new churches were allowed to be built.

The slurp and crunch of cement mixing can be heard on Calle 114 in Havana's southwestern suburb of Marianao. Next to one of the new state-owned fast-food outlets, where the staff wear McDonald's-style hats, three volunteers are putting up walls for a new Pentecostal church. Ricardo Morales, the oldest member of the building team, is a short, wiry figure of 51 who has devoted most of his life to the revolution. He went to Angola as an *internacionalista* in 1975, arriving with the brigade that managed to prevent a South African invasion force from seizing the capital. After three years' service, he returned to a state farm in eastern Cuba, where he worked as a technician. A loyal communist, he married a party member who taught English and Russian at the local school.

It could have been a textbook case for socialism, but in 1993 they heard an evangelical missionary preach. His message sent doubt cascading through their household. Ricardo's wife decided to convert. Ricardo followed a month later. The worry was how their comrades would react to the news, even though faith in God had been officially declared to be compatible with communism. "One night, there was an agenda item on religion. Everyone had to say what they were doing to discourage it," Ricardo recalled, as he propped his spade to one side and we sat on a dust-strewn bench in the church's half-finished nave.

"I announced I was doing nothing about it. I had become religious myself, and wanted to resign from the party." His comrades' shock moved quickly to anger. Ricardo was thrown out of his job, and given lower-paid, unskilled work on a building site. After a few months, his boss sent him off for training, and Ricardo was eventually promoted to head a construction team, until he moved to Havana to start working for the Church. His wife was luckier. When she told her comrades she had become a religious believer, but wanted to stay in the party, they agreed. Her job was unaffected.

Ricardo's change of faith has not affected his respect for the revolution's social achievements, such as the free health system and free education. But he no longer admires its best-known icon: "For us, Che has no value. We believe in God," he said.

Church sources claim the government's softer line towards believers was prompted by a general

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The Catholic hierarchy fell out with the revolution when Castro took power in 1959, and for almost 20 years church-state relations were frozen in a kind of cold war. But Catholicism was never implanted as well as it was in the Pope's native Poland even before the Cuban revolution. Few villages had churches, and most Cubans rarely went to mass

Left, a Catholic pilgrim crawls to church

PHOTOGRAPH: GIANFRANCO GORGONI

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revival of religion at the end of the eighties. Numbers can only be estimated, but 4.5 million of Cuba's 11 million people are said to be Catholics. The figure for baptisms in the archdiocese of Havana show a five-fold increase from 7,500 in 1979 (of whom 300 were young adults) to 34,800 in 1994 (of whom 3,000 were young adults). The government has allowed more people to enter the priesthood, and opened the way for another batch of foreign priests to come to work in Cuba.

In one sense, therefore, the Pope will be pushing at an open door. Officially, his visit is described — as it has to be — as "pastoral". If that means merely trying to improve the status of the Church and its flock, he will have no great difficulty. If he denounces the callous economics of neo-liberalism, and the growing gulf between rich and poor in the new global market, as he did in on his visit to Brazil in October, he will get a sympathetic nod from Castro. What the Pope said in Brazil and what Castro says on his own foreign trips is almost identical: no economic system is complete without social justice; a free market ideology that promotes excessive individualism and under-mines the role of society is unacceptable.

INDEED, since the collapse of communism, the Pope has not only stepped up his attacks on the ravages of unregulated capitalism, he has even had a kind word for Karl Marx. Four years ago, in the Latvian capital, Riga, he startled listeners by saying that Marxism contained "a kernel of truth".

But the Pope remains a conservative on the role of the family. He does not accept the modern tendency to put it in a relative context. "The family", he said in Rio, "is the privileged context for the growth of all the person and social potentialities that human beings have written in their being." In John Paul's Church, marriage is indissoluble. The use of contraceptives and abortion is evil. If he repeats these messages in Cuba, people will tune out for these parts of his sermons, just as many Catholics in developed countries do.

What Cubans of all shades — both those who support the revolution and those who oppose it — are keen to see is how far the Pope strays into politics. Cardinal Ortega's phrase about "opening up your structures" was a clear hint that he hopes the Pope will have an impact on the political scene. When Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, the man they call the Vatican Foreign Minister, visited Cuba in November 1996 to pave the way for the Papal trip, he went further. He used a sermon in Havana to appeal to Cuba to make more "spaces for freedom".

John Paul II is probably the most directly interventionist and political Pope this century. The powerful role he played in undermining communist rule in Poland was revealed in a recent book, His Holiness, by Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi. They point out that President Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, himself a Polish émigré, attended John Paul's inauguration and kept him briefed on a covert CIA operation to smuggle anti-communist books into eastern Europe to encourage dissident nationalism.

Carter, the idealist from the Deep South, had tried to make ethics the hallmark of his presidency, and when he visited the new Pope in June 1980, they talked of how the Vatican might use propaganda and



Cubans celebrate the announcement of the Pope's visit with flags and banners outside a church in Havana PHOTO: RAFAEL PEREZ

pressure to provoke human rights in Poland without provoking a Soviet clampdown. Comparing the Pope's political cunning with Carter's moralising, Brzezinski joked afterwards, "It became clear to me that John Paul should have been elected president and Carter should have been elected pope." This was two months before a shipyard electrician called Lech Walesa organised his comrades into the strike that led to the foundation of the trade union, Solidarity. As Solidarity moved into high gear and the anti-communist Ronald Reagan became president, links between the CIA and Vatican strengthened. Bill Casey, Reagan's CIA director, was a staunch Catholic and regularly visited the Pope for consultations.

When Poland's Communist leader, General Wojtiech Jaruzelski, under heavy pressure from Moscow, declared martial law and arrested Solidarity's leaders, the Pope's first reaction seemed soft. "Too much blood has already been shed, especially during the last war. Polish blood must no longer be spilled," he said. But John Paul had a long perspective. Convinced that Jaruzelski could be worked on as a Polish patriot and might be a secret believer, he started exchanging letters with him.

The Pope argued that the Church stood "in solidarity with the Polish nation" to "bolster certain values and principles such as the rights of man and the rights of the nation". He was saying that communism was a temporary phenomenon, and that Jaruzelski should re-open talks with Solidarity. It took eight years, but the argument worked. Aware that Moscow had a new, non-interventionist leader in Mikhail Gorbachev, Poland's communists renewed the dialogue with Solidarity and conceded elections. Solidarity won. Five months later, the Berlin Wall fell.

Cuba is, of course, very different from Poland. The Catholic Church in Cuba has never been the keeper of the national conscience. With its preponderance of Spanish priests and an image as a white, upper-class body, it was seen as an import that did not support independence in the last century and resisted change in this one.

Because of constant US pressure, the symbol of national independence is Fidel Castro. Although US presidents never seem to understand this — Castro has outlasted eight of them — his image as a patriot is stronger than his role as a communist leader. He personifies the liberation ideology, not just on Cuba itself, but for many Latin Americans who resent America's imperial role in their hemisphere.

THE POPE appears to know this better than Washington. The Vatican has consistently criticised the American embargo of Cuba, just as it criticises the US-led embargoes on other countries, such as Libya and Iran. But that does not mean the Pope accepts communist rule. Vatican specialists are convinced he wants a "soft landing" for the island, a process of change that will lead to greater pluralism, avoid bloodshed or a civil war, and protect Cuba's social achievements of health care and universal education.

In Poland, he suffered under Nazism and communism. He has consistently denounced "totalitarianism" and, in the mid-eighties, described it as "the shame of our time". In a document aimed at Catholics who supported liberation theology, he condemned regimes that come to power by violent revolution and then enslave their peoples instead of liberating them. "Those who, perhaps out of thoughtlessness, become complicit in this sort of enslavement betray the poor whom they intend to save," he wrote.

What contacts on Cuba the Pope may have had with the CIA or the Clinton administration are not clear, but his line broadly chimes with theirs: as long as Cuba had a firm ally in the Soviet Union, US policy was geared to denouncing Castro and trying to isolate him and undermine his economy. In the post-Soviet world, the US language is more sophisticated, and the policy more intrusive and political.

Taken from the experience of post-communist eastern Europe, the new buzz-word is "transition". President Clinton signed the so-called Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act last year. Better known as Helms-Burton, after its congressional sponsors, the law infuriated European governments with its attempt to make American law international by penalising companies which do business with Cuba.

For Castro, the act's most insulting section is its brazen effort to dictate internal policy. It lays down US strategy "towards a transition government" and specifies methods for providing "assistance to a free and democratic Cuba". It promises help to "strengthen and stabilise the national currency" and "prepare the Cuban military forces for an appropriate role in a democracy". Most patronisingly of all, it hints that the fall of Castro could be accompanied by social upheaval. "The US recognises the potential for a difficult transition from the current regime in Cuba that may result from the initiatives taken by the Cuban people for self-determination in response to the intransigence of the Castro regime in not allowing any substantive political or economic reforms."

And what could be the trigger for Washington's hoped-for "people power" uprising on the model of Prague and Berlin in 1989? Clearly, the Pope's open-air masses are one such opportunity, especially now that Castro has given permission for John Paul to hold one of them in Havana's most sacred arena, the Plaza de la Revolucion. What if the Pope talks of "freedom" and the crowd takes up the cry?

Castro has survived large street protests twice before. His tactic was to open a safety-valve by letting thousands of disgruntled Cubans get on small boats or rafts and leave for Florida. But most observers in Cuba feel that unrest is unlikely during the Pope's visit: "Don't expect much. People still believe in Cuba. They understand the utopia they were fighting for," said one well-connected Western diplomat. "The Pope's visit will allow Fidel to look good internationally."

Gerardo Sanchez, who heads the dissident Committee for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, sees the visit in pastoral terms: "We don't expect miracles from it. It'll strengthen the church's position and give it more room for manoeuvre," His organisation favours the kind of round-table talks and "national accord" that preceded the fall of the Franco regime in Spain, but sees little hope of Castro accepting it.

Few Cubans expect anything to change until Castro dies. The very word "transition" annoys him, and one of the first wall-slogans John Paul will see as he takes his Popemobile from Havana airport proclaims: "There will be no transition in Cuba." In spite of some steps to liberalise the economy, including the legal use of the dollar as an official currency, Castro made it clear in October that these were "admissible concessions". "Communism destroyed itself. It committed suicide in the Soviet Union, but we have no reason to commit suicide," he told an interviewer two years ago.

Although the end of the US embargo would help the Cuban economy, its presence strengthens Castro politically by reminding Cubans that their sovereignty is under threat. In the words of a pro-government sociologist, it also prevents the kind of massive inequalities of wealth that have emerged in China: "The US forces the political class here to have an alliance with the popular masses to prevent unrest."

FIDEL CASTRO, who is now 71, has not made any overt arrangements for his successor. His brother Raoul, who heads the armed forces, is six years younger and the most obvious man in line. Other contenders include Carlos Lage, a former children's doctor who is now in charge of the economy, who is a competent if cautious technocrat; Ricardo Alarcon, president of the National Assembly, who is more open and charismatic and has an astute political mind; and Roberto Robaina, at one time thought to be Castro's favourite, who was plucked from his job as head of the Young Communists and made foreign minister.

Whoever is nominally on top, most observers expect the army to play the crucial role in Cuba's future. Castro and his brother Raoul have given the army an increasingly significant stake in the economy: it owns one of the island's travel agencies, a partnership in hotels and the biggest chain of dollar shops; its arms factories are now switching their attention to civilian goods; and it already produces much of Cuba's food by letting conscripts opt for work in the fields.

Oscar Espinosa, a dissident who left the National Bank a few years ago, says, "The armed forces are a contradiction. They are liberal in economics, and tough in politics." His remark suggests that a Cuba after Fidel could look increasingly like China's "market Stalinism". The government is improving its terms for foreign capital, though it refuses to allow foreign businesses to hire Cubans directly. They must obtain workers by signing a contract with a state organisation or an army-owned company. Thus, the government can control wage rates, and take a cut. It has also passed a decree tightening penalties for "labour indiscipline".

Cuba remains a complex and unique society. Unlike many east Europeans, who blindly hankered after the US model, Cubans are better informed. They fear the inequalities, the crass consumerism, and the imported arrogance and loss of property if the Miami exiles return in a rush. They want the best of the socialist and capitalist systems, but fear they will get the worst. They know their leader is a dictator, but respect his values and admire his dedication. Even those who are hungry for change want it to come only gradually.

In short, Cuba does not give the visitor the sense of a place on the verge of a social or political explosion. Whatever ripples the Pope sends out on his four-day mission, they are unlikely to reach the shore until both he and Castro are no longer alive.

Letter from Bamako and Brittany Jeanne Lacville

Cat and riddle

LACVILLE loves cats. You will often find him of an evening, sitting under the mango tree cuddling a kitten, or teaching it to chase his belt buckle.

Our beautiful Black Cat was the most promiscuous and prolific cat we have ever had; a real vamp with queues of boy-fiends. She would always get pregnant before she stopped feeding her previous litter.

Most African cats have short hair and blotchy colouring. But our kittens were beautiful. For several years we produced and distributed kittens to African villagers: some black, some grey-striped, occasionally ginger depending on the colour of our princess's latest paramour.

Some Malians like black cats; others fear their association with magic. But everybody loved our friendly, cuddly, long-haired kittens. Africans usually ignore their cats, which grow up wild and unfriendly, catching mice or stealing food for survival. Our kittens were trained by Lacville's cuddling to be every small child's best friend.

I write in the past tense because some months ago the Black Cat disappeared. "Someone needed her," said Leo the gardener mysteriously. "Why would anyone 'need' our cat?", I wondered suspiciously. Had Leo sold her off to the "someone" and for how much? Lacville wanted to demand a cut of the selling price, or to deduct it from Leo's wages.

"Black cats are good for black magic," Leo told me, in the sort of voice which men use to explain incomprehensible and unfunny male jokes. But Leo wouldn't joke about magic.

"Also, black cats are good to make people invisible. First you find the black cat, then the marabout makes sacrifice, then you eat certain parts, and no man can see you no more." I shudder to think which parts have to be eaten.

It seems pretty clear that we shall see Lacville's cat no more. "I hope the thief really believes that he is invisible," said Lacville over breakfast. "There is a story people tell about a man who killed and ate a black cat, because he wanted to rob a Bamako bank. Convinced that no one could see him, he ignored challenges from the bank guards, and headed for the strong room. It was only when they hit him on the head with a nightstick that he realised the magic had failed. I hope our thief gets hit very hard, and not just on the head."

Trust Lacville to end with a tasteless observation. It brought raucous laughter from the children, naturally.

When we came to France for the Christmas holidays, our neighbour Armelle, two doors down, asked if we could feed her cat for three days. Lacville said the children would be delighted to do so.

The children showed no interest whatsoever in Armelle's cat, so Lacville set about preparing cat food. On the first afternoon he set off, proudly carrying a chicken carcass from our lunch.

"Are you sure that French cats eat chicken carcass?" I asked doubtfully. Lacville assured me that all cats consider chicken carcasses.

"It will be a real treat. Our Bamako cats eat cold fried potatoes and leftover rice, and if they can get at a couple of chicken bones before the dog takes them, it's a real bonus. Armelle's cat is getting a *whole* carcass and no competition! She'll be delighted."

He put the carcass in the cat's dish. The cat sniffed doubtfully. Armelle's cat didn't share Lacville's idea of a treat.

"*What* are you giving to zat cat?!?" shrieked the elderly lady who lives between Armelle and ourselves.

Lacville explained proudly, but Madame Bollardière was having none of it. "But you can see she is not liking eet! You cannot give chicken carcass to a cat. It is a scandal! She will only eat Canigou!"

Our elderly neighbour descended with a tin of Canigou and relieved Lacville forthwith of cat-catering duties. I came out on to the balcony just as she made the mistake of pushing Lacville's temper too far.

"Eet ees cruelty to animals to geeve zem such food. I wonder, how do you treat your cats in Africa?"

My heart sank as Lacville shot back: "At least my cats are natural cats. I do not castrate them for my own convenience like you, Madame. My cats get pleasures that your cat cannot experience . . . but I dare say *you* have forgotten such pleasures!"

I am avoiding Madame Bollardière for the rest of the holiday, and Lacville refuses to have anything further to do with European cats. He has calculated that the cost of a meal of Canigou for one French cat would provide five African children with more protein than they would normally share among them in a day.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

A FRIEND of mine said she became quite manic and bad-tempered after eating one banana each day for about a week. Is this the origin of the phrase "going bananas"?

WHEN I complained to my doctor about tiredness, I was told that I had over-high levels of potassium which were caused, he thought, by my eating a lot of bananas. If the questioner's friend was bad-tempered, it could be that she might then have craved a food which would have calmed her down, the bananas being the cure and not the cause. As for "going bananas", folklore makes bananas the favourite food of monkeys, a popular symbol of disorder and misbehaviour. — *Kate Fisher, London*

IN 1984, a High Court ruling meant that the remains of Edward the Martyr, King of England, were deposited in a branch of the Midland Bank in Croydon. Are they still there and why?

THE murdered king was first exhumed from Corfe Castle when healing miracles began to be reported at his grave, and was reburied in a shrine at Shaftesbury Abbey, to be venerated by medieval pilgrims until the Reformation, when he was again disinterred and reburied in a secret location within the Abbey grounds for safe-keeping. The estate passed into the hands of the Claridge family, and in 1931 the bones supposed to be those of St Edward were again exhumed.

John Wilson Claridge wanted these bones, as the remains of a royal saint and martyr, to be appropriately laid to rest, and invited a number of Anglican bishops to receive the bones for re-interment. His offer was declined, and there was contact with English members of the Orthodox Church, who agreed not merely to receive the relics but proceeded to acquire a former chapel of rest at Brookwood, near Woking, for conversion into a basilica for the relics.

Claridge's younger brother Geoffrey disputed through the High Court the elder's ownership of the bones and his entitlement to surrender them to the religious order, hence their sojourn in the vaults of the Midland Bank. The Attorney-General's Office became involved in the affair because of the relics' supposed royal origin, but was satisfied with the security arrangements at Brookwood, and allowed arrangements to proceed. — *Bruce Purvis, Salisbury, Wiltshire*

WHAT'S the difference between a herb and a spice?

IT DOESN'T seem correct to say that a herb is a plant that does not have a woody stem (Notes & Queries, November 19). This would exclude such herbs as rosemary, lavender, lemon verbena, and doubtless many others. Rather, the difference between herb and spice seems to lie in the part of the plant that is used: if it is the leaf, or perhaps the flower, it is a herb; if it is the dried seed, nut, fruit, root or stalk, it is a spice. Coriander belongs to both categories, depending on the form in which it is used: the fresh leaves are a herb; the seeds, a spice. — *Justin Harris, Siena, Italy*

WHICH should I join, Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth?

BOTH. — *Peter Melchett, director, Greenpeace UK; Charles Secrett, director, Friends of the Earth*

I HAVE heard that urine is quite sterile. How can this be — I thought that urine served to rid the body of toxins?

THE ancient Zoroastrian religion has long recognised this property. In a number of its rituals it uses bull's urine in both consecrated and unconsecrated forms as part of its procedure for obtaining ritual purity for practitioners. The bull's urine (gomez and nirang) is taken externally and internally. — *Peter Clark, Roath, Cardiff*

THE former Indian prime minister Morarji Desai, a practitioner of urine therapy who religiously drank several glasses of his urine every day, lived until the ripe age of 92. — *Ajay Singh, Hong Kong*

UNFORTUNATELY many traditional healers believe urine always to be sterile. Sometimes they instruct their eye patients to quite literally "take the piss" and instil in the affected organ. If the patient has gonorrhoea the result is disastrous. The gonococcus is one of the few organisms which can penetrate an intact corneal epithelium, leading to an overwhelming infection. The eye becomes a bag of pus, and is rarely salvageable. — *Andrew Pyott, Phnom Penh, Cambodia*

Going bananas . . . does Britain's favourite fruit drive you round the bend? PHOTOGRAPH: ROGER BAMBER

WHERE does the expression "going haywire" come from?

IT COMES from early 19th century hay baling machinery. When the wire left the guides, as happened all too often, it would make an impossible snarl. Those who have seen it tell me that it is a frighteningly accurate metaphor. — *Peter Ruderman, Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

WHERE will it all end?

AFTER T. — *Ronald Morton, Caracas, Venezuela*

COSMOLOGISTS are presently pursuing the answer through observations of the value of Omega (the observed density of the universe compared to a critical density). The value of this parameter determines the fate of the universe: if Omega is greater than 1, the universe will collapse into a "big crunch" (the end), but if Omega is less than 1, the universe will expand forever (no end).

Omega exactly equal to 1 means the universe will stop expanding at infinity (no real end). Present observational data puts omega between 0.3 and 1, while theoretical arguments advocate omega equal to 1. So, to answer your question, never! — *(Dr) Bob Nichol, Pittsburgh, USA*

AT Wits' place. — *Stuart Beattie, Windhoek, Namibia*

IN TEARS. — *Alaisdair Raynham, Singapore*

IN BILL Gates's bank account. — *Frederick Borden, Berkeley, California, USA*

Any answers?

HOW can consumers most effectively influence a US energy industry that is so intransigent in the face of global warming? — *Neil Hunt, Eccles, Kent*

MOTHER GOOSE is celebrated in pantomime, and she is recorded as having been buried at St Olave's church, London, on September 14, 1586. But who was she? — *Will Watson, London*

AT WHAT speed would Father Christmas have to travel to visit all the world's children (say, under 11 years old) in a 24-hour period? — *William Barrell, London*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. The Notes & Queries website is at http://nq.guardian.co.uk/

Kingdom of the knave's raptor

Paul Evans

IT'S A dark old morning. Away from the orange sodium street-lights, these fields hold their own pool of darkness. Gradually, eastwards above wooded pitmounds of The Nab, another small-town industrial dawn flowers, red as the ghosts of long-cold furnaces. The redness spreads across the sky until it holds an entire zeppelin-shaped cloud in a scarlet flame. Suddenly a dark speck appears against the glow, a living blur of wings, a kestrel.

The kestrel hovers above the field, looses, dips, gains a few feet and hovers again. What can it possibly see, 30ft down in the cold, wet darkness?

Taut, on some invisible kite string straining against the earth, the kestrel defies the gravity which slowly drags the vegetation of the field down into its hungry mud. No two wingbeats are the same. The pinions whirr then still. The tail rudders, fans and brakes.

The kestrel dives, aborts, resumes its position — hover-glide-hover. But the psychic beam from behind that sickle beak keeps still as it lasers inch by inch through the grass. Does the kestrel see every beetle, shrew, mouse, vole, only choosing which is worth diving for? Does anything stir in this cold wet winter morning, or is the kestrel hunting because it knows no other way to be? Will it kill now? Is it hopeful, or starved and mad?

The kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*, is the most common and widespread of our falcons and is found in most open and semi-open habitats throughout western, central and southern Europe, east to the Caspian sea, throughout the Middle East and north Africa. It breeds in old nests on cliffs and buildings and has adapted well to urbanisation, often being seen in the centre of cities and hunting along motorway verges.

With the characteristic long-pointed wings of about 100cm, kestrels are not our largest, or smallest falcons, but they are perhaps the most accomplished hoverers. The males have a blue head, nape and tail, a reddish back and wings with dark spots, while females are tawny with dark spots. They are usually solitary by nature.

ILLUSTRATION BARRY LARKING

As a falcon, this bird shares a world mythology and solar symbolism, common to the Incas, the Celts and Chinese. In Egyptian myth the falcon is king of the birds; Horus is depicted as a falcon or falcon-headed; his wings are the sky and his eyes are the sun and moon. In Norse myth, Odin travelled to earth as a falcon. The Tuleyone tribe of America have a falcon deity called Wekwek who stole flame from heaven and set fire to the Earth. Perhaps this kestrel of the red dawn is doing the same.

Falcons were trained to the gloved fist for hunting, as practised in Asia from the 8th century and in Europe from late medieval times. In falconry, social status was measured by falcon species: "An eagle for an emperor; a gyrfalcon for a king; a peregrine for a prince; a saker for a knight; a merlin for a lady; a goshawk for a yeoman; a sparrowhawk for a priest; a kestrel for a knave."

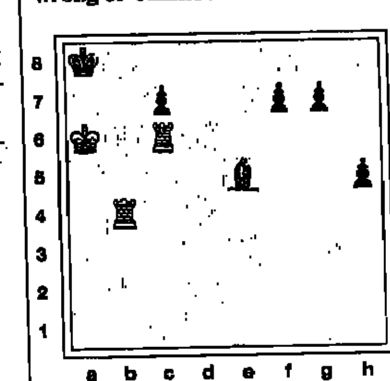
If the kestrel is the knave's falcon, this is knave's land: a common for scoundrels, of coarse grass and knavish weeds. Before the day takes hold, the kestrel's magic grips this little world, answering all this knave's stupid questions by just being.

Chess Leonard Barden

IT'S MATE in four moves in the Guardian's Christmas Chess puzzle, which looks simple enough.

Many players, let alone solvers, would fancy their chances in a position where White has two rooks against a lone bishop and four harmless pawns, and where the black king is already trapped in the corner awaiting execution on the back row.

But it's not so easy, and when the puzzle appeared in Germany some years ago, 90 per cent of would-be solvers either got it wrong or claimed no solution.



So, White mates in four moves at latest, against any defence. Send White's first move only to Christmas Chess, Weekend Guardian, 119 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER to arrive by first post on Monday, January 26, 1998 or e-mail to: weekend@guardian.co.uk. Every entrant, right or wrong, will receive a complimentary copy of Chess Monthly.

Awards for the first three solutions examined after the closing date are as follows:

1 £50 and the newly-released Fritz 5 chessplaying and database program used by many top grandmasters.

2 £30 and Fritz 5.

3 £20 and a year's subscription to Chess Monthly. There will be 100 consolation prizes of ChessBase Magazine CDs.

Answers and names of main prizewinners will appear in mid-February.

One of the best practical approaches to opening theory is to specialise in sharp, offbeat lines used by only a few top players.

Beating The King's Indian And Benoni, by Anatoli Vaisser (Batsford, £12.99), surveys the Four Pawns attack against the KI and Benoni, a line in which its author has a personal score of 85 per cent and a rating of 2700.

Such extensive and revealing analysis is remarkably frank for an openings book, and includes prepared, unpublished novelties.

Long-standing Guardian Weekly readers may recall earlier articles where I recommended the Four Pawns, and GM Vaisser's high-quality research should prove a useful point-scorer for any club or tournament player graded 150 or higher, or for any ambitious junior.

Blokh v Kitchev, 1991

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 0-0 6 Nf3 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Be2 exd5 9 exd5 b5 10 e5 dxe5 11 fxe5 Ng4 12 Bg5 f6 Qa5?! 13 0-0 Nxe5 14 d6 favours White, while if Qb6 13 0-0 c4+ 14 Kh1 Nf2+ (Nd7! is critical) 15 Rxf2 Qxf2 16 Nxb5 Nd7 17 e6!

13 exf6 Bxf6 14 Qd2 Re8 If Bxg5 15 Nxg5! or Bf5 15 0-0!

15 0-0! b4 If Bxg5 16 Nxg5 Ne3 17 d6!? **16 Nd1 Bb7 17 Nf2! Bxg5 18 Nxg5! Nf6** If Ne3 19 Nfe4! Nxf1 20 Rxf1 Rf8 21 Ne6 is strong.

19 Ng4! Nxg4 20 Bxg4 Qxd5 21 Qf2! The threat 22 Be6+ forces a won ending. **Qd4 22 Qxd4 cxd4 23 Be6+ Rxe6 24 Nxe6 and White won.**

No 2504: Not 1 Nhg4? f1Q! 2 Nxf1 Kg2 3 h4 Kxf1 4 h5 Ke2! 5 h6 g2 draws but 1 Nhf1! g2 2 h4! g1Q 3 Kf7! traps Black's new queen.

Bridge Zia Mahmood

HERE is the Guardian's Christmas Bridge Competition. In the problems below, you are South playing rubber bridge of a high standard — both your partner and your opponents are expert players. The system is Acol — four-card majors and a weak no trump. The vulnerability is always Game All.

Rank the suggested calls in order of preference. When answering, rank *all three suggested calls* — don't just give your preferred call! For example, if the calls were 1♠, 1NT, and double, and you believed that 1NT was best, double next best, and 1♠ worst, your answer should be: **1** 1NT **2** Double **3** 1♠.

I'm sorry if this appears obvious — but in previous years, readers who might have won the competition have sent in only their preferred call for each problem! So please answer in the form shown above.

Problem 1

South	West	North	East
		1♥	1♠
?			

♠A1065 ♥Q92 ♦K9832 ♣4

Rank in order of preference: double; 1NT; 2♥.

Problem 2

South	West	North	East
?			

♠Q109873 ♥AKQ4 ♦AK ♣A

Rank in order of preference: 1♠; 2♣; 2♠.

Problem 3

South	West	North	East
			1♣
?			

♠J8652 ♥AKJ104 ♦AQ ♣3

Rank in order of preference: double; 1♥; 1♠.

Problem 4

South	West	North	East
?			

♠AJ108432 ♥K973 ♦2 ♣4

Rank in order of preference: pass; 1♠; 3♠.

Problem 5

South	West	North	East
	3♣	Pass	Pass
?			

♠AK ♥K732 ♦J9865 ♣A4

Rank in order of preference: double (takeout); 3♦; 3NT.

Problem 6

South	West	North	East
		1♠	Pass
?			

♠K75 ♥AQ102 ♦J83 ♣A64

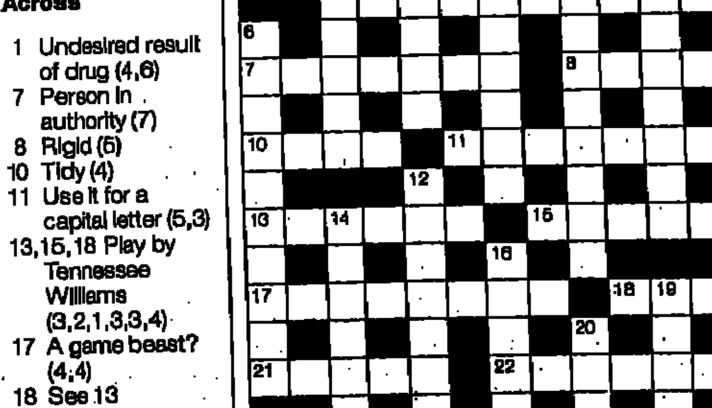
Rank in order of preference; 2♣; 2♥; 3NT.

Your answers, which should arrive no later than January 26, 1998, should be sent on a postcard to Guardian Weekend Christmas Bridge Competition, 119 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER; or fax your answer to Guardian Weekend Christmas Bridge Competition on (+44 171) 239 9935; or by e-mail to: weekend@guardian.co.uk.

The end of January may seem rather late for the results of a Christmas competition for those who live in Britain, but we receive many entries from Guardian Weekly subscribers in far-flung parts, and I feel it is important to give all my readers around the world a fair chance to enter the competition.

The winner of this competition will receive a prize of £100, and two runners-up will each get £50 each. So good luck, I hope you enjoy the problems, and a Merry Christmas to you all! ©

Quick crossword no. 399



Across

1 Undesired result of drug (4,6)
7 Person in authority (7)
8 Rigid (5)
10 Tidy (4)
11 Use it for a capital letter (5,3)
13,15,18 Play by Tennessee Williams (3,2,1,3,3,4)
17 A game beast? (4,4)
18 See 13
21 Stroll (5)
22 No good (7)
23 Strict harsh discipline (1,3,2,4)

Down

1 Balkan capital (5)
2 Aquatic bird (4)
3 Coarse or crude (6)
4 Microwaved burgers etc (4,4)
5 Chirpy insect (7)
6 Horn of plenty (10)
9 They can glide over the sea (6,4)
12 Keep wand (anag) — wild plant (8)
14 Barrier for payment at bridge etc (4-3)
16 Swallow up (6)
19 Expanse of water (5)
20 Carry — beast! (4)

Last week's solution

CLAM SLOVAKIA
A S I E E L
RUSE SKEGNESS
R E S E E L O
IMMACULATE
A E H Y A B I
GALLON STRAIN
E Y O S I O F
SLOWCOOKER
O O G I N R A
PALLIATE TOUR
U U R C O E
STEALTHY AMID

Are fiddlers all highly strung?

Peter Kingston tests his theory that musicians come to resemble the instruments they play



Neil Tarlton and his double-bass

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARTIN ARGLES

ASK orchestral players if they think any of their colleagues look like their instruments and they will invariably mention the brass. Even brass players do. So, rephrase the question. A professional musician is walking across a foyer, but not carrying an instrument. Could you reliably tell what they play? The answer is: not necessarily, but you can usually spot the brass.

Why do musicians reckon they can spot the blowers? Members of the Philharmonia very sportingly took time from a busy rehearsal schedule to discuss the whole instrumorphosis question. Instrumorphosis? What we're talking about is transformation into the shape of an instrument — and no, it isn't in the dictionary yet.

"I think there are caricature brass-type players," says the Philharmonia's fourth horn player, Robert McIntosh, choosing his words carefully. "People think they're beery looking," he says, explaining that his own healthy ruddiness is down to long hours spent on the golf course.

"A beard has always been associated with the French horn, but don't quote me on that." Since he has a fine beard himself, disobeying this injunction seems justified. So do brass players like their beer? "No more than anyone else," he replies.

His colleague, John Jenkins, who has played the tuba in the Philharmonia for 29 years, says: "It's been grossly exaggerated from the beginning. And certainly the pressures these days are such that you must have complete control at all times."

Both he and McIntosh admit that brass players are often well-built. "You need to be strong; the physical effort required is enormous," says Jenkins, adding that he could be described as on the rotund side himself. "But there are some very fine small players," says McIntosh.

Both men came to their instruments via routes familiar to so many British professional orchestral players, apart from violinists. Like many, both were handed an instrument at school because it had just become available, or because there was a gap in the school orchestra which the music teacher wanted filled.

"We needed someone to play the bassoon in the junior school orchestra when I was 11," recalls Gordon Laing, who was learning the violin and piano at the time. "I did a deal with my mum. I could give up the violin and take up the bassoon if I passed my grade three."

He took up the contrabassoon at 14. In those days, he had a hairline. Nowadays his head has a lustre under concert lights which harmonises with the sheen of the brass bend on top of his instrument.

He chuckles and says that perhaps growing into an instrument is more a question of personality. "If you want to generalise you can say string players are more uptight. For us, the vibrations when we play are slower and more relaxing. This is not an instrument for making the stabbing sounds you sometimes get in the strings."

Karin Tilch, who is number 12 in the first violins and has been four years in the Philharmonia, is slim and fine-featured. Violinist traits? "Fiddlers come in all shapes and sizes," she says. But she does think there can be a correlation between a person's stature and the instrument they choose?.

Are fiddlers a little, um, highly strung compared to the rest of the band? "There are so many colours on the violin. I think people choose the instrument with the most possibility of expressing themselves."

Double-bass players are probably recognisable, says Neil Tarlton, the Philharmonia's principal in this growly department. Darting your fingers long distances up, down and between four long and thick wires, and making those wires shudder with music, takes a lot of energy. "Double-bass players are fairly largish and are never as a rule too far from somewhere licensed or smartish restaurants. We have a prodigious eater in our section who has a snack before and after meals. I think on the whole we are pretty sociable."

Andy Smith, the Philharmonia's timpanist for the past quarter of a century, was a good enough pianist as a boy to be playing concertos with the Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra. Invited to take up another instrument so he could be in the orchestra, he selected the oboe because he fancied the other oboeist.

He goes along with the notion that some instruments suit some personality types. "Oboe players tend to be a little tight-lipped . . . while bassoon players are relaxed. One of our bassoonists calls his instrument a 'grunt pole'."

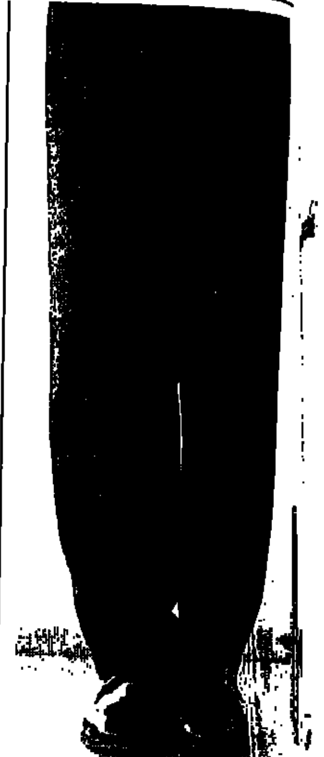
At six foot four, Keith Bragg, the Philharmonia's piccolo player, confounds any theory of instrumorphosis. He is also the orchestra's chairman. "As a kid I always wanted to play the piccolo."

He goes along with the idea that some instruments suit certain characters. "Brass players tend to be more ebullient, louder personalities, and more outgoing, and that's very understandable, whereas string players would tend to be quieter, more part of a group."

But what about physical resemblance? He could hardly go along with that.

He recalls getting in a lift before a concert with Yehudi Menuhin, who was conducting that evening, and his wife. "Lady Menuhin looked at me and said: 'You must be the piccolo player.'"

And so it turns out that the only person in the sample to have prompted someone to guess correctly which instrument they play is the giant with the piccolo.



In tune with their instruments! . . . Keith Bragg with his piccolo (above) and Karin Tilch with her fiddle (below)



Stepping out of character

Lyn Gardner on what drives actors to unscripted outbursts

IN NOVEMBER, during the matinée performance of her much acclaimed Electra at London's fashionable Donmar Theatre, the actress Zoe Wanamaker shocked both cast and audience when she suddenly stepped out of character to berate a group of whispering students.

"Don't you understand how difficult it is to play this role? If you're not interested, then just leave," she is reported to have shouted before exiting the stage. She returned a few minutes later and the performance continued. At the end, the audience gave her a standing ovation.

Outbursts from actors faced by audiences that they consider to be less than appreciative are far from uncommon. "Book a cab for me too," yelled Richard Burton after a party departing early during a performance of Camelot on Broadway.

Burton had a notoriously low boredom threshold and hated long runs; once when he was playing Hamlet in New York, he began the "To be or not to be" soliloquy in German on hearing that there was a group of German tourists in the audience.

In 1996 Paul Higgins, who was playing Macbeth, told a party of schoolchildren at the Forum Theatre, Wythenshawe, that unless they stopped talking, "I'll rip your bloody heads off". The rest of the cast were particularly impressed that his line scanned and that he remained entirely in character.

Macbeth tends to bring out the worst in both actors and audiences. During the mid-seventies Nicol Williamson threatened a noisy Stratford-upon-Avon audience that he would go back to the very beginning of the play and start again if they didn't shut up. You could hear a pin drop for the rest of the performance.

In recent years, performers have had to contend not just with whisperers, snorers and sweet-paper rustlers but also with new technology. The mobile phone and digital watch have become new curses of the West End. The first night of the Janet McTeer A Doll's House at the Playhouse was disrupted when one woman took a number of calls on her mobile phone. At the 1997 Edinburgh festival, I saw the comic Scott Capurro leap offstage and angrily start rifling through the bags of the audience in search of an offending phone.



Zoe Wanamaker in Electra

If actors complain that audiences are getting rowdier, and audiences that actors are getting ruder, the truth is that parties on both side of the curtain are probably better behaved now than they have ever been. The solemn, silent audience of the modern theatre is a 19th and 20th century invention. Before that, audiences came and went as they pleased, chattered among themselves, ate, drank and generally disregarded what was going on onstage. But if they didn't like it, they would think nothing of staging a small riot.

There is an unverified story about an actor playing the ghost in Hamlet who was so frequently interrupted that he eventually declared politely: "It was my hope to please you; if I have failed, I must give up the Ghost."

Some theatres in particular gained an exceptionally notorious reputation for the poor welcome extended to the performers. The Glasgow Empire became known as the "Comedians' Graveyard" after the singer Mark Sheridan killed himself following a hostile reception there in 1918. Fifty years later, the place was considered no more welcoming. Eric Morecambe declared that many top-billed comics would "rather have open-heart surgery than face Glasgow".

On the other hand, an audience that is too appreciative can be just as off-putting. At the West Yorkshire Playhouse, a production of The Importance Of Being Earnest was severely disrupted when a member of the audience clapped almost every line.

The real problem for modern audiences and performers is that it is increasingly difficult to gauge appropriate behaviour. It is perfectly appropriate for a six-year-old to sing along with the cast during a matinée of Oliver!, but it is a distraction when Paula Yates's child snuffles her way through the very grown-up The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, as she did at the Lyric Hammersmith in November.

Its star, Rupert Everett, would have been forgiven if he had taken his lead from the 18th century actor John Kemble who stopped the performance after being repeatedly interrupted by a wailing baby in the gallery and said: "Ladies and gentlemen, unless the play is stopped, the child cannot possibly go on."

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
January 4 1998

Delving with elves

ART
Adrian Searle

Charmed life . . . The Artist's Dream (1857), by John Anster Fitzgerald

FLIT, flit, flit. Bloody fairies, with their gossamer wings and pert little, pink little botties. Flit, flit, flit, they go. They really get on my nerves: they've upset the dog, made a real mess of the curtains and one of them has just tangled itself in my beard. It's enough to drive a man to laudanum.

Tip-toe to Tinkerbell-land in the Sackler Galleries at London's Royal Academy for the exhibition Victorian Fairy Painting, avoiding Saatchi's Young Brits on the floor below. Victorian fairy painting was under the influence of mock-medievalism, German and British Romanticism, Pre-Raphaelitism, folklore, Spiritualism and soppiness. The Faerie Queen, Midsummer Night's Dream and the Brothers Grimm also had a lot to answer for. And so, of course, did the opiated tincture.

The show is a real sensation: the whole dingly dell is full of fairies — fairy frolics in Arcadia, Busby Berkeley formation fairy fly-pasts, fairies in their grottos, fairies in bird's-nest bowers and fairies in the bedroom. Nowhere was safe: the Victorian imagination had fairies on the brain.

More than a few of the artists who got down and delved with the elves were slightly bonkers. Richard Dadd murdered his father and was interned in Bedlam. Diagnosed schizophrenic, he was by all accounts harmless enough, aside from his patricidal moment, and spent years toiling away on his minutely detailed, derailed masterpieces — Contradiction: Oberon And Titania, and the greatest of all fairy paintings, the Tate's The Fairy Feller's Master Stroke. It could well be that both his murderous act and his retreat into a sinister, haunted fairy world were reactions to childhood abuse.

The Doyle brothers both suffered mental infirmity. Richard Doyle died of apoplexy, while Charles, father of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, ended up in a lunatic asylum, the result of alcoholism and epilepsy.

Richard's wonderful watercolours and book illustrations are packed with incident and teem with the little folk. The best is The Fairy Tree, in which the tree's branches cross the paper like musical staves, and on every branch perches a mad miscellany of fairy folk. They lounge, they leer, they jostle, they fall in and out of love. The tree is a microcosm of human folly and aggrandisements.

Richard seemed to like his fairies, while Charles appears to have been tormented by his. The artist sits at his table, haggard, careworn, bored and exhausted by the apparitions that have invaded his life. He's a listless Mr Pooter. A levitating woman shouts in his ear, pixies prance on his table and crawl underfoot. It is a hilarious scene, but also a familiar one: think of Francisco de Goya's wonderful etching The Sleep Of Reason Produces Monsters. Fairies, like Goya's owls, bats and crones, are embodiments of inner torments and desires.

Edmund Dulac pictured an entomologist perching on his bed, his pinned and boxed butterfly collection coming back to life to haunt him in the wee hours.

John Anster Fitzgerald's opiated reveries peopled his nightmares and his paintings with the diminutive, hallucinated denizens of the unconscious. The artist depicted himself nodding off at his easel, the studio invaded by a monstrous cast of creatures less from some diaphanous never-never land than from the terrifying world of Hieronymus Bosch.

Fitzgerald's dream pictures (often including a slumbering figure — either the artist himself or, more often, a supine sleeping beauty) are plagued by the creatures of nightmare. His paintings belong to a druggy super-real. They are brightly lit, overly rich, spiky, slithery and creepily sexual. The little women in his paintings are doe-eyed and wan, but far from innocents.

Thomas Heatherley's Fairy Seated On A Mushroom also looked back at Netherlandish nightmare, and — weirdly — to Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, but the atmosphere is all Heatherley's own. It is an obscene painting, all the nastier for its perfumed colour and the deeply unpleasant procession of mosquito-winged nudes parading in a frieze across the sky.

Henry Singleton's neo-classical, wide-eyed Ariel is borne aloft on the back of a horribly real, sinister, long-eared bat. It fair makes yer flesh creep. Many of these artists, one supposes, had difficulty with women.

The most surprising artists fell for the fairies. Even J M W Turner wasn't immune to them. His Queen Mab's Cave, from 1846, is a misty world drowned in light. A nude takes flight with a swan, and more of Turner's unconvincing little figures cavort in the mysterious, cloud-covered landscape. The painting seems to conflate The Tempest with A Midsummer Night's Dream. Samuel Pepys, on seeing the latter play, described it as "the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life". It didn't stop the ridiculous doings of Oberon, Titania, Puck and the rest from becoming the staple of the Victorian fairy world. Pepys would have known how to deal with the varmints, probably with a well-aimed chamber-pot.

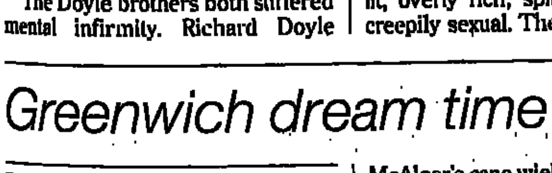
It is less surprising that John Atkinson Grimshaw, who cornered the market in wintry, moonlit, wet-leaved nocturnes, turned his hand to the fairies. The atmosphere of his paintings speaks of cold walks home through the cobbled lanes of Hull or Liverpool, perhaps after a chilling evening of table-turning, muslin ectoplasm and tuning in to Auntie Ada on the ouija board.

His Iris, of 1886, is a shimmering, shivering nude, inexplicably hovering on the wings of a dragonfly over a lonely woodland backwater in the autumnal dusk.

The whole idea of fairy painting is so absolutely daft, so utterly ridiculous, so completely, quintessentially, repressedly Victorian, that it is really much more wonderful than I'd ever imagined. But fairies? I ask you — at least leprechauns have got a bit of go in them, and the wood sprites have the decency to stay outdoors. Fairies, on the other hand, are just, well, irritating. Or so I thought. The first world war and DDT are supposed to have seen them off, and TV cartoons rendered them obsolete. But this exhibition is, I believe, part of a more general comeback.

We know all too well what lurks at the bottom of the garden nowadays. It isn't the fairies we should be afraid of, more likely the people who painted them.

Victorian Fairy Painting at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, until February 8



Greenwich dream time

THEATRE
Michael Billington

A SEVERE cold normally prevents me attending adaptations of novels. But, with Greenwich Theatre about to have its grant chopped by the London Arts Board, I sped to its current **David Copperfield**. And what did I find? A full house; a lively production by Matthew Francis free of the self-conscious artiness you often find in staged books; some fine acting. Every sign, in short, of a thriving, popular theatre.

Not even Francis, who has done the adaptation, can cram everything into three hours. Certain characters are either gone or reduced to a shadow. Dickens's meditative preoccupation with memory is also thinned out on stage. But Francis has had the bright idea of dividing the narrator hero, neatly played by Damien Matthews and Paul Bailey, into two so that the mature David is able to quiz his younger self about his actions, allowing Dickens's fascination with the loss of innocence to come through.

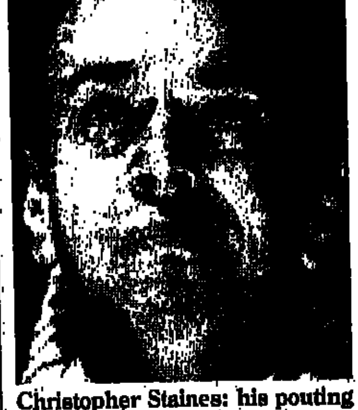
This version also scores two great successes. Lez Brotherston's design easily accommodates Dickens's geographical restlessness. The acting also conveys the essence of character with Daumier-like skill: Des McAleer's cane-wielding Mr Creakle is all staring eye and brutal hoarseness, Brian Poyser's Mr Dick has an unhinged geniality.

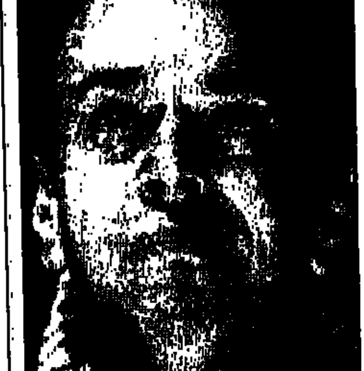
Some things in the story still puzzle me: why does David take so long to grasp the Satanic side of his schoolboy chum Steerforth? But this is a strong, true adaptation, and it is significant that those who came prepared to treat it as Victorian melodrama were quickly silenced by the moral complexity.

The Gate Theatre in Notting Hill is also having its grant cut. But the work goes on at London's boldest theatre, with artistic director David Farr ingeniously completing a season of Buchner plays by turning the little-known Leonce and Lena (1836) into a twenties musical.

Some may flinch. But there is no reason why this subversive fairytale should not be musicalised. Even if the style of the composers in his Leonce And Lena ranges from early Julian Slade to middle-period Hindemith, this new version, adapted by the up-and-coming Lee Hall, preserves the quintessential oddity of Buchner's text. A newly-enthroned king and queen plan to create a Utopian state in which "hard work will be a heinous offence".

Buchner is clearly satirising any number of things in this quaint, dislocated comedy: German Romanticism, petty political autocrats and the mechanistic view of living things which, at one point, turns the hero and heroine into doll-like automata.





Christopher Staines: his pouting prince is highly plausible

But Farr's production, by deploying the same stylised techniques as in his recent Candide, establishes an intriguing historical link between Buchner and Voltaire: both humanist libertarians with a hatred of imposed systems.

And, even if this updated account of Buchner's play has its whimsies, Christopher Staines's pouting prince and Tom Fisher's commonsensical servant make a highly plausible pair, and Laura Hopkins's design, with its footlights and swishing red curtain, wittily shows that the proscenium-arch has achieved a postmodern irony.

A question of focus

POP
Adam Sweeting

LAST month, Blur's bassist, Alex James, appeared on the Brit Girls television programme about Marianne Faithfull. "It's a very hard thing to do, having the balls to change, but you have to," he said. "You can't pretend you're Jumping Jack Flash, can you, when your hair's falling out?"

Ostensibly he was talking about the Rolling Stones and La Faithfull, but his remarks apply to Blur, too. The sometime darlings of Britpop learned the hard way about the dangers of stereotyping, finding themselves stamped indelibly as pop's dodgy geezers from Walthamstow dog-track, then getting sucked into the "battle of the bands/north versus south" vortex with Oasis.

The popular wisdom was that Oasis won, but as we look back on 1997, the picture looks different. Blur released an album called Blur, its minimalist title representing a metaphorical wiping of the slate. It was quirky, scuzzy and aggressively electric, dimensions removed from either Parklife-Blur or the slab-like singalongs of the brothers Gallagher. It earned Blur some critical respect and more importantly, it bought them some freedom to evolve. Oasis meanwhile ossified with horrifying speed.

Blur have adapted surprisingly well to the booming vastness of arenas, and for this Wembley Arena show they'd even managed to concoct a decent sound mix.

So far so good, but the snag is that there are now multiple Blurs. Having leapt to freedom with one giant bound, they're running around in all directions as if to make sure nobody can stick them in a pigeonhole. Some of the new stuff sounded great, like a loose but purposeful Beetlebum or a beefy, hypnotic On Your Own, but just when you thought you were getting the hang of the performance, Blur would undergo another disorientating metamorphosis. There were interludes of coruscating garage-punk and Hüsker Dü-style speed metal. Some resembled Kurt Weill's cabaret songs, albeit with electronic warping effects, and there was something that very nearly became Career Opportunities by The Clash. There was historic Blur, via She's So High, Popscene and There's No Other Way.

Still, the band looked confident and played with nonchalant expertise, with singer Damon Albarn bouncing like a striker hovering in the six-yard box. Blur are creating plenty of chances, but can they nod them into the net?

England, his England

Jeremy Lewis

Coming Home:
An Anthology of Prose
by John Betjeman
Edited by Candida Lycett Green
Methuen 537pp £20

JOHN BETJEMAN was one of those wonderfully deceptive Englishmen whose self-deprecation and amiable buffoonery — though genuine enough — told only half the story. Unusually accessible in terms of both style and subject matter, he was the most popular poet since Kipling, yet his verse is shot through with melancholy, anger and a terrible, corrosive fear of death. Far from being a kind of holy fool adrift on the literary landscape, he was a tough-minded, hard-working and highly professional writer who knew exactly what he was up to.

His daughter, Candida Lycett Green, reckons that between the 1930s and the 1950s he reviewed more than 3,000 books and 500 films, as well as writing books, essays, radio, talks, architectural polemics and columns for publications as varied as Vogue and the London Evening Standard. From this vast mound of material she has made a marvellous selection, some excavated from yellowing press cuttings while some — the introduction to his English Parish Churches, the script of Metroland, memories of old friends like Auden and Maurice Bowra — is rather more familiar. Almost everything he wrote combined a passionate delight in people and places with a sense of their sad impermanence. Betjeman himself remained in part the small boy who had been bullied at school, all too aware of "the dark corner in the locker room, the yard at the back of the coal shed".

"It is something really terrible, this longing we get for England when we are away," Betjeman wrote during the war, part of which he spent — enjoyably enough — working for the British embassy in Dublin. His love for England, "so kind and so complicated" — and a corresponding fury at the damage being done to it by "witless local councillors, people on the look-out for building land, electric light companies, county councils with new road scheme, the wrong sort of planner" — provides Coming Home with its leitmotif.


John Betjeman: A consummate professional PHOTO: JANE BROWN

He loathed cars, sanitary engineers and the arterial roads that snaked out from that "vile octopus London", trailing hideous villas in their wake, yet bicycling through the suburbs one evening he was overcome by the "strange beauty" of the scene, by "a father smoking his pipe and rolling the lawn; mother knitting at the open window; the little parade of little shops; the great outline of the cinema, the new bricks pinker than ever in the sunset; the sham Tudor beams; the stained glass in the front doors; the pram in the hall …"

His great passion may have been a vanishing England that was being destroyed "for the rather doubtful advantage of running hot water in everybody's bedroom and aeroplanes for all", but elsewhere was not neglected. He loved Australia and Ireland, noting that "the Irish are not mad and spooky and vague and dreamy, as some of them would have us think, but extremely logical … we are poets, they are realists." Parish churches, Cornish villages, Bournemouth's pines and pensioners are celebrated here; so too are half-forgotten heroes like Hawker of Morwenstowe and Sabine Baring-Gould, author of "Onward Christian Soldiers".

Admirers of Summoned By Bells will find themselves, at times, revisiting old haunts: the woman who dismisses the poet-to-be as "rather a common little boy; or the terrifying Marlborough ritual of "basketing", whereby unpopular or unsporting boys were stripped, covered in paint or ink and hauled aloft in a giant wastepaper basket. Recalling how — to his intense relief — he was spared the ordeal in favour of a boy called Pringle, Betjeman's eye for detail, and the pathos of possessions, are used to a stunning effect. He notices Pringle's brown eyes peering through the slats; when the nightmare is over, he steps out of the basket, "carrying his trousers on one arm, and in his hands a pair of very pointed black shoes".

The haunting season

Fiona Maddocks

Missing the Midnight:
Hauntings and Grotesques
by Jane Gardam
Sinclair-Stevenson 144pp £10

Tales of the Night
by Peter Høeg
translated by Barbara Haveland
Harvill 308pp £14.99

PLUNDERING ancient English folklore and modern manners for her subject matter Jane Gardam has fashioned a dozen sturdy stories with surprisingly dark souls. Subtitled "Hauntings and Grotesques", they trespass on a world of menace and shadow with all the brio of a rambler tramping an overgrown footpath. Short, stocky sentences march ahead of the languid poeticisms usually preferred for tales of the unexpected. Never is a word wasted.

In "Missing the Midnight", the opening story which gives the book its title, a sullen 20-year-old is on the train travelling home, reluctantly, to a family Christmas, having just abandoned college and been jilted by her boyfriend. She watches her three fellow passengers — an enamoured young couple and his ageing father — envying their freedom of mind and emotion compared with her own drab misery. Their encounter is largely unacknowledged beyond a brief word and smile. At King's Cross the girl's family wait loyally at the barrier ready to welcome her back in the fold, her escape thwarted. With economy and a fine ear, Gardam plays out the dull rhythms of the London-bound train and the narrator's own earth-bound, imprisoned spirit to their inevitable conclusion.

The title story belongs to a group of five "Carols", all loosely linked by season. "The Zoo at Christmas" takes Thomas Hardy's "The Oxen" as a starting point, giving the power of speech to a zooful of creatures. Talking animals are an acquired taste. Aristophanes and George Orwell pulled it off, Babe and Beatrix Potter didn't do badly. Gardam is somewhere between the two, but finally misses her footing.

The second group, entitled "Five Grotesques", are morality tales with a twist of old-fashioned magic realism. Each centres on a character to whom something fantastic has happened. For example Clockie Gosport, who sweeps the road at a chemical plant, has an unexplained diamond in his neck on which his life depends, and Eglantine Fosche-Grill, an icy magazine editor who worships at the shrine of haute couture, finds golden hair growing from her ears like sheaves of wheat. Only when she renounces the world for a convent does she find a cure. These are stories that haunt long beyond the words on the page.

The same cannot be said of another nocturnal collection, Peter Høeg's Tales Of The Night, first published in Denmark in 1990. All the stories are set on March 19, 1929. Each has a theme such as physics, mathematics, art, drama. All examine an aspect of love — its violence, power of redemption, desire to possess. The book reads as if Høeg had erected an elaborate clothes drier and pegged his stories to it willy-nilly. The sententiousness maddens.

Høeg's characters are unpleasant but not worse, unless you consider dullness a crime. In "Portrait of the Avant Garde" an acclaimed young painter has his arrogance undermined by his modest girlfriend who, when they return to her childhood home and the old ways she knows, blossoms at his expense. The props of fame gone, he shrinks to insignificance but gains no humility.

What grates further is the excessive, unconvincing length of these tales. Høeg's characters and their strange narratives remain as cold as the Baltic landscape they inhabit. Rarely has a beaker full of the warm South been so urgently required.

Time pundits

Ray Monk

Questioning the Millennium
by Stephen Jay Gould
Cape 208pp £12.99

AS 2000 approaches, predicts Stephen Jay Gould, "there will be an orgy of millennial books", inspired by an apocalyptic angst that he himself regards as "speculative, boring, and basically silly". Gould is an eminent zoologist, whose books on various, often tangential and recherché, aspects of biology and geology have established him as one of the best popular science writers of our time. He writes with great wit and humanity, conveying his immense scholarship with an attractive lightness of touch and a willingness to strike the occasional personal, even intimate, note with his readers.

But what is he doing writing about such an intrinsically daft subject as "the millennium"? He does not, it scarcely needs saying, attach any importance to the entirely arbitrary calendrical calculation that makes midnight, December 31,1999 the end of one millennium and the beginning of another. Neither is he very interested in speculating on the psychological source of the anxiety that such arbitrary transitions seem to inspire. No, his interest lies in the very arbitrariness of the calculation, and the confirmation it provides of an aspect of mankind that he finds as endearing as it is ridiculous: the determination to impose a neat order upon the messy realities of nature and then to attach to that artificially neat order an entirely spurious significance.

To take the messy realities first: the Earth spins on its axis, the moon revolves around the Earth and the Earth around the sun. Nothing messy there, you might think, except that God (whom Galileo, Sir James Jeans and many others have supposed to be a mathematician) has, in His infinite wisdom, refused to make any one of these events a nice, neat arithmetical multiple of the other. The moon, for example, does not take 30 days to circle the Earth, but 29.53059; similarly, the Earth takes not 365 days to go round the sun, but 365.242199. "What a bummer," Gould remarks.

And so it has proved for anyone who likes to believe that a day is a day, a month a month and a year a year. Keeping track of days, months and years (and, therefore, of course, millennia) isn't that simple, and Gould provides an entertaining and enlightening account of the heroic attempts of the past to prevent the calendar from running away with itself.

Julius Caesar introduced the system of counting one year in four as a "leap year", whose extra day took care of the pesky 0.25 of a day that was added to every multiple of 365 days that we call a year. But this did not solve the problem, since the even peskier fraction by which a solar year falls short of 365.25 meant that the calendar kept, slowly but surely, accumulating extra days — seven in every 1,000. To solve this problem, Pope Gregory XIII decreed that the day following October 4, 1582 should be October 15 and that, henceforth, the calendar should lose a day once every hundred years, so that 1700, 1800, and 1900, for example, were not leap years. The advantages of this system were not admitted by the British until 1752 (when Parliament was forced to decide that September 2 should be followed by September 14), and the Russians did not accept it until after the fall of the Tsar (which is why the "October" Revolution is — or was — celebrated in November). The Orthodox Church still refuses to accept it.

Similar contrivances to those adopted by Pope Gregory enable us to keep track of the months in a year, and thus to maintain a more or less stable definition of when the 12 months of one year end and the new year begins. But what about this number 2000, how do we arrive at that? Well, Gould shows, it is all the fault of Dionysius Exiguus, a 6th century monk, who, at the Pope's behest, introduced the system, according to which years are counted backwards and forwards from the estimated date of Christ's birth. Unfortunately, Dionysius made two errors: first, he got the date of Christ's birth wrong, so that we are now compelled to assert that Christ was born no later than 4BC, and second, he did not allow a year zero between 1BC and 1AD. This latter poses serious problems to millenarians, since it means that, strictly speaking, one should celebrate each millennium, not at the beginning of a year ending in three noughts, but at its end. Fierce debates on this question were held at the end of both the 18th and 19th centuries, and, owing to the pressure of logical die-hards, the 20th century did not officially begin until January 1901.

GOULD'S sympathies in this debate are with popular, rather than learned, opinion. The new millennium, he is happy to accept, will begin on January 1, 2000, and, if this means that the first decade had only nine years, then so be it. In this, he is influenced by the affections of his son, who, he reveals at the end of the book, is one of those extraordinary people, who, though classified as autistic, possess the talent of calculating the day of the week on which any date falls. Such calculations are bewilderingly complicated; not only do they have to wrestle with the arbitrariness of the Gregorian calendar, they also have to deal with that additional piece of human absurdity, the seven-day week, a division that has no basis in nature whatever.

Gould is understandably fascinated by this peculiar talent, and the book ends with a moving declaration of his pride in his son's abilities. And suddenly one realises why the subject of millennial obsession and calendrical calculation matters to him. Unable to make sense of much of what happens around him, his son has hit upon chronology as one key to the order of things. Gould reflects that his son shares with all of us the desire to order the events of the world so as to make it just that little bit less perplexing.

Paperbacks

Nicholas Lezard

Walter Benjamin: A Biography, by Momme Brodersen, trs Malcolm R Green & Ingrida Ligers, ed Martina Dervis (Verso, £14)

THE blurb of Verso's edition of Benjamin's One-Way Street is right: "No study of modern cultural criticism, and no survey of Continental philosophy this century, would be complete without the mention of Walter Benjamin." Benjamin is most often referred to (in Britain at least) in a somewhat off-putting, knowing tone, as if it were understood that he was the founding father of what is called "Cultural Studies", but that no actual evidence is needed to support it.

Part of the problem is the difficulty of finding his works in English — although Verso do their bit and Fontana publish a selection which includes his most famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"; another problem has been that Benjamin neither made things easy for himself, nor found them made easy for him.

His *oeuvre* is scattershot, in a way which we find quite acceptable now but which wasn't in the first three decades of the century in Germany (that he was Jewish had a significant effect on his job prospects); and history conspired to make things as bad as possible for him. Even if you know little or nothing of Benjamin, it's worth it for the portrait of a country tearing itself apart.

Finding the Key: Selected Writings of Alexander Goehr (Faber, £11.99)

NO ONE uninterested in contemporary music will have heard of Goehr, which is a pity, as he is one of our best living composers. We should have the greatest respect for anyone who writes intelligently about music in such a way that non-musicians can have a clue about what is going on, and Goehr is one such.

These pieces acknowledge and illuminate many of the problems facing modern composers. From Modern Music And Its Society (1979): "… the real interest in the content — the philosophical content — of modern music has disappeared, and I am afraid that very often all that remains is a sort of personality cult, centred on the flamboyant imitators in the high arts of the much more genuinely challenging pop or punk personalities." Blimey.

Collected Poems, by Charles Olson, ed George F Butterick (University of California Press, £24.95)

THERE are times when Olson can make e. e. cummings look like Kipling; and there are times when he can look like Kipling himself. But there is less bluster and boast in his poetry than in Whitman and his epigones, although I would rather have William Carlos Williams than either.

This is still an impressive testament, to Olson and his editor; and much as Olson went on about the way poetry should be read out rather than read on the page, these look very good on the page. Unfortunately, the book does not contain his magnum opus, The Maximus Poems, but is none the worse for that.

Literary legends: (from left to right) DeLillo, Mailer, Updike, Bellow, Pynchon and Roth ILLUSTRATION: STEVEN O'BRIEN

US cultural imperatives

James Wood reflects on the state of the American novel over the past year

TESTING the truth that the bank does not have enough money for everyone to withdraw on the same day, all the major American novelists have produced books in 1997 — Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Philip Roth, John Updike, Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo. And, in fact, the bank did not have enough money: it has been a usefully clarifying year.

Three novels can be dismissed swiftly. Bellow's book The Actual was a mere ricochet from a writer who has hit many targets in the past. Most readers anxiously forgave its slightness. Norman Mailer's The Gospel According To The Son, a fictional autobiography of Christ, was an absurd novel, a stunt written in a strange, abandoned version of The King James Bible, as if some rival monarch had broken into the text and stolen its gold. It will be remembered for Mailer's extraordinary boast at the time of publication, that "I'm one of the 50 or 100 novelists in the world who could rewrite the New Testament".

Of course, Jesus warned us about false prophets. Finally, John Updike's Toward The End Of Time, sour, misogynistic and automatic, suggests nothing so much as a celebrated aphorism by the Yiddish writer Y L Peretz: "It is not enough to write in Yiddish; one must have something to say." It is not enough for Updike to write in English; he must have something to say beyond the annual edition of his sexual obsessions.

These three books suggest that Bellow is old and distinguished; that Mailer is old and undistinguished; and that Updike is not as old as he seems — he is just creaking into the autumn of a long, graphomaniacal prosperity.

However, DeLillo's Underworld, Roth's American Pastoral, and Pynchon's Mason & Dixon are substantial, demanding books, and two of them — the Pynchon and the Roth — are almost great. Underworld, which attempts to gather 40 years of American history, and is about the long shadow of the atomic bomb, never quite makes good on the huge ambition that propels it. It is a solemn failure — of a kind that almost any novelist might be proud to have written. Mason & Dixon, a picaresque novel about the two 18th century English surveyors who first demarcated slave-owning and free America, is a marvellous verbal structure. Its language is a flexible alloy capable of bending calendrically to take in both modern jokes and 18th century complexities. American Pastoral is that old American form, the novel as metaphysical missile, restlessly demanding that its characters be brought to the bar of spiritual judgment. It is also about America in the 1960s, and what that period has bequeathed to us.

In America, the epic reach and vigour of Pynchon and DeLillo, and the comparative weakness of Mailer, Bellow and Updike, have prompted several commentators to claim that the old generation is washed up. In the New York Observer, the critic Sven Birkerts argued that the old men — Roth, Mailer, Updike, Bellow — were narcissists whose thread of self had been unravelled over the years and was now used up. The newer novelists, goes this argument, are epic writers, interested in history, in plots and in paranoia. Other critics have agreed, noting that next year both Toni Morrison and Russell Banks are publishing novels about episodes in American history (Banks's 800-page novel is about John Brown, the man who essentially started the Civil War).

> **US fiction is no longer about the comedy of character. It is about the comedy of culture**

The problem with this argument is, first, that it ignores Philip Roth, who is clearly in his artistic prime and who has always had a vivid interest in American reality; it is just that he is also interested in the American self, while DeLillo and Pynchon are not. And secondly, it is notable that the best passages of writing in Underworld are those that most obviously show the deep influence of Bellow.

Nevertheless a new pressure can be felt: Such talented younger writers as David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen and Rick Moody all speak of the influence of DeLillo and Pynchon, and show a marked interest in society, in American culture, and in the echoing power of historical events.

Such writers constitute a shift in American writing, and prompt a few early observations. First of all, American fiction seems to have largely abandoned the avant-garde. Or rather, a mild avant-gardism of content is still viable, but an avant-gardism of language and form is not. Writers continue to fit more American reality into their books, as that reality changes; but they are not especially interested in testing the limits of form. They will not flirt with difficulty or silence. This can be seen in the recent books of DeLillo and Pynchon (Mason & Dixon is by a long way his most crowd-pleasing and comprehensible), and in the novels of those they influence.

The formal question instead becomes what the American writer writes about, not how. The obvious answer is: American culture, which has a shallow avant-gardism of its own. American fiction is no longer about the comedy of character, as it was in Bellow and Roth. It is about the comedy of culture — the mess we have collectively got ourselves into, not our individual messes.

This in turn brings back an old-fashioned dilemma, one voiced by Henry James, and more recently by Philip Roth: the relation of the American writer to American reality. In 1960, Roth said, essentially, that American reality is too much like fiction for the novelist to compete with it. And yet the novelist must compete. Roth's advice, and practice, suggested that the novelist should swerve away from the earnest documenting of American reality, and into the documenting of the self.

But the most interesting American writers today are embedded in history. In both Underworld and Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest, one sees novelists wrestling with the question of how to write about, and simultaneously outwit, an idiotic contemporary culture that threatens the existence of the novel — the illiterate barbarism of film, television and celebrity journalism.

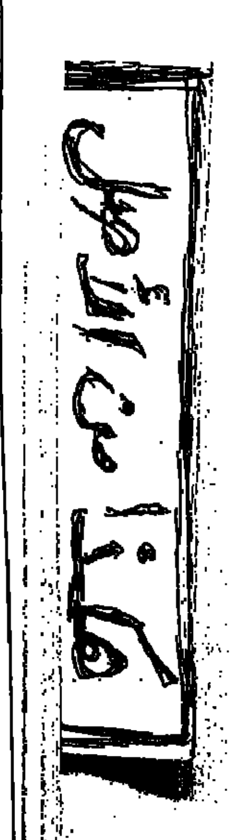
The younger novelists have noticed that the generation immediately preceding them — writers like Jay McInerney, Bret Easton Ellis and Tama Janowitz — were unable to get sufficient distance from the culture they wrote about, and produced novels which were examples of the very cynicism they were supposedly satirising. It is unlikely that novelists will now make that mistake, but they are unsure of how to proceed. This is clear in the recent book of essays by David Foster Wallace, in which on the one hand he blames almost all cultural degradation on television; and on the other, violently condemns those who are snobbish about television.

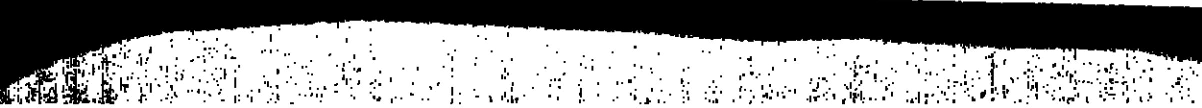
A worrying element of the interest in American culture is a new insularity and "presentism". The younger American writers often give little sign of being interested in literature before 1950 — Pynchon, DeLillo and Cynthia Ozick are cited as the great influences, not Melville or James. American culture is always interesting, but it is trivial and has the parochialism of something which never needs to be translated: it is a universal language.

The older generation of "narcissists", if that they be, confronted American insularity by taking refuge in the expansions of the self, which could cross national boundaries, and remain culturally particular. Thus Roth's American playground of the ego has influenced Milan Kundera's central European playground of the ego.

American culture, by contrast, is too universal to be particular, while American interest in American culture is too particular to be universal. Can one imagine any European writer being influenced by DeLillo's wholly American paranoia, by Toni Morrison's excavations of American shame, or by Foster Wallace's densely allusive postmodern world? American culture is now world culture but, to put it mildly, the rest of the world is not as interested in American culture as America is, because it did not produce it. Infinite Jest came with its own footnotes. If American writers fail to find a way out of their agonistic relationship with American reality, in 10 years' time such a book will have to add footnotes to its original footnotes.

Don DeLillo's Underworld is published in the UK by Picador (£17.99); John Updike's Toward the End of Time by Hamish Hamilton on February 26 (£16.99). If you would like to reserve a copy of Underworld at the discount price of £16, contact CultureShop (see ad on page 22)





Stars eager to set the record straight

John Dugdale

PUBLISHED five years ago, Nick Hornby's Fever Pitch has been given credit for any number of spin-off effects, from the craze for foreign managers to the de-blokeification of homo Britannicus. Within its own field, the book's impact is less debatable: greater acceptance of "literary" sportswriting; breaks for non-sports journalists; and the revitalisation of the diary genre.

In 1997, the ripple-effect of Fever Pitch showed no sign of waning, as the diary again proved the most flexible form of story-telling. Former Middlesex cricketer Simon Hughes's startlingly candid **A Lot of Hard Yakka** (see review), was a deserving winner of the William Hill Sports Book of the Year award.

Also inventive were David Hopps's **We're Right Behind You Captain!** (Robson, £17.95), counterpointing the course of the Ashes series against his own experiences as captain of a Yorkshire league side, and Lawrence Donegan's **Four-Iron in the Soul** (Viking, £15.99), chronicling a year as caddie on the European pro circuit.

Alongside these fresh dispatches from sport's basement, the orthodox big-name, hack-ghosted solo trudge through a year or series looks played out, as **Ashes Summer** (Collins Willow, £14.99) seemed to recognise by pairing up Nasser Hussain and Steve Waugh as co-authors. Lawrence Dallaglio's **Diary of a Season** (Virgin, £16.99) at least had the interest of being published just before he was made England captain.

Richard Williams's **Racers** (see picture) was an insightful, elegantly written hybrid diary. But otherwise the year was short on classy lives of still-active sportsmen, although it boasted fine portraits of past heroes in Robert Low's **W.G.** (see review) and Nick Varley's **Golden Boy: A Biography of Wilf Mannion** (see review).

Best of the mass-market celebrity apologies was Kevin Keegan's **My Autobiography** (Little, Brown, £15.99), in which the strange absence of self-curiosity, and the inability to perceive how loopy some decisions must appear to others — spending six years mid-career golfing in Spain, say, or trying to win the Premiership without a defence — gradually become compelling. So far, however, the Ataturk of the Geordie nation and double European footballer of the year would seem to be losing out in the sales war to the 360-page after-dinner speech that is Dickie Bird's **My Autobiography** (Hodder & Stoughton, £17.99).

What 1997 can boast is a superior class of stocking-filler, typified by Nick Hancock's **What Didn't Happen Next** (Chameleon, £12.99), which applies the techniques of "counter-factual" history to football — cogently arguing, for example, that Thatcherism would never have happened had Gordon Banks been fit for the 1970 World Cup quarter-final.

One effort guaranteed to be most often chucked across living rooms in irritation — precisely the result its author's "best ever" judgments are designed to achieve — is Frank Keating's **Sporting Century** (Robson, £16.95); while the book most likely to induce bliss is John Updike's wonderful **Golf Dreams** (Hamish Hamilton, £13.99).



Richard Williams's Racers (Viking, £16.99) concentrates on the personalities of grand prix racing, writes *Pat Symonds*. The book is based on Damon Hill's championship-winning season of 1996, and analyses the political manoeuvrings in the Formula One paddock. An enjoyable read. PHOTO: STEVE ETHERINGTON

These sporting lives

Graham Dawe

Rugby's New-Age Travellers
by Stuart Barnes
Mainstream £14.99

THIS book goes into depth about recent problems off the pitch and the world game as a whole in a chapter dedicated to the Rugby Football Union. Barnes comments on the merits of the Five Nations championship and life in general. He even rejoices over the day John Major left office, which is surprising for a man who always wears a blue tie.

Pat Nevin

Left Foot in the Grave;
A View from the Bottom
of the Football League
by Garry Nelson
Collins Willow £14.99

HAVING already given us the best-selling Left Foot Forward about his playing career, Gary Nelson's recent step into management made for an obvious and inevitable follow-up. Those who enjoyed the previous work will not be disappointed.

The book attempts to give an inside view of the lower reaches of professional football and its management. With his appointment as assistant manager of Torquay United, who finished 92nd out of 92 the previous year, Garry vividly brings to life all the fears, traumas and joys of a manager struggling along in the game's foothills.

David Foot

W.G.
by Robert Low
Richard Cohen Books £18.99

THE Old Man won't lie down — quite right, too. This latest biography, the best and most comprehensive yet, upbraids those who like to recall the famous hirsute Victorian simply as the subject of a scorebook of crease-side stories of unmitigated gamesmanship. This book doesn't recoil from the unendearing traits.

Above all, he was a cricketer of vast talents, and Robert Low parades the paradoxes with an intelligent but not overacademic touch.

Paul Allott

A Lot of Hard Yakka
Triumph and Torment.
A County Cricketer's Life
by Simon Hughes
Headline £16.99

TO SPEND 14 years compiling a diary of the seemingly meaningless minutiae of county cricket may seem like the worst possible way to construct a book that would interest anyone but the avid cricket fan. Yet Simon Hughes has managed to encapsulate his life in cricket into a fascinating account in A Lot Of Hard Yakka. For the uninitiated, "yakka" is Aussie-speak for work.

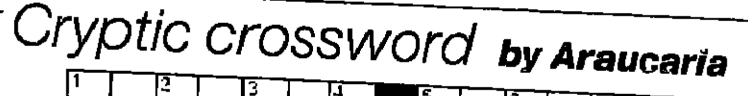
Hughes was a talented cricketer, who played for Middlesex and Durham, and was regarded on the county circuit as a live wire. He also wrote a comical, regular weekly column in the Independent.

Obviously the journalism stood him in good stead, for the book is a warts-and-all account of dressing-room banter, the responsibilities, and more often than not the irresponsibility of the county player.

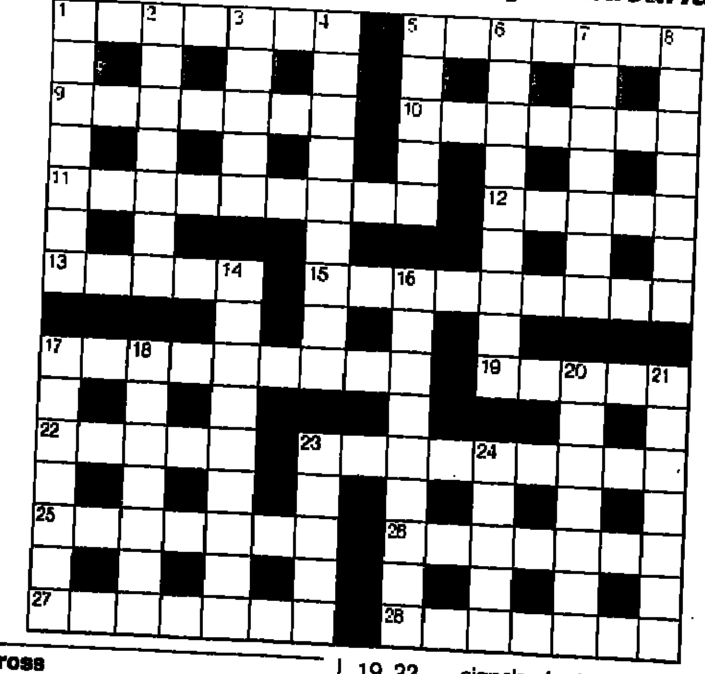
Tom Finney

Golden Boy
A Biography of Wilf Mannion
by Nick Varley
Aurum Press £14.95

THIS long overdue life story of my old friend and England inside-forward partner certainly brings all the memories flooding back. It is immensely readable, capturing all Wilf's great triumphs and his subsequent ups and downs. As well as conjuring up a vivid recollections for us old-timers of a certain generation, the book will also be a revealing eye-opener for all modern-day and more youthful football people, not least the present day Premiership players. They would do well to read it.



Cryptic crossword by Araucaria



Across

1 Deal in cars etc. . . (7)
5 . . . most of which — say nothing! — are flashy (7)
9 Row about a commercial being boring (7)
10 Corporation, as they say, necessary for survival (4,3)
11 Troglodytes, a spinner and an architect (5-4)
12,13 Novelist and computer man gain access to mansion (5-5)
15 Weights desiderated in summertime on Bredon (4-5)
17 Keep a slot prepared for 4, 21, and . . . (4,5)
19, 22 . . . signals of value to Bill (10)
23 Goes to law about cricket club's endless illegal play, achieving popular victory (6,3)
25 Having no wings suitable for real movement (7)
26 Pain makes snake-like creature hot (7)
27 Ratio to end indefinitely (4,3)
28 Hidden state of two numbers in song (7)

Down

1 Dog goes to prison for aping man with tricorn (4-3)
2 Silver article in street (the other side) (7)
3 Displaying eccentricity brings criticism on your head (5)
4 Sam's point in opposing meteorological phenomena (9)
5 Boy or bird or other case (5)
6 Racket at the front not wanted when plucking (6-3)
7 Heathen at home with much of the foregoing (7)
8 Veiled threats to Luton by Sheffield Wednesday supporter? (7)
14 Juice, yield of hip, and its colour, blue (9)
16 Variety of total raised by one church 100 percent (5,4)
17 See little Bill, the fool, at church service (3,4)
18 King with time and money for horn (7)
20 Thug gives Scotsman a frill (7)
21 Bob has little money for people in general (7)
23 Loves, oddly, to do crosswords (5)
24 A number of pieces (5)

Last week's solution

M	E	N	D	I	P	S		P	R	O	P	O	S	E
	S		O		I		C		O		E		E	
S	C	O	W		C	O	O	R	D	I	N	A	T	E
	H		S		K		N		N		F		B	
R	E	V	E	A	L		S	P	E	A	R	M	A	N
	A				E		I		Y		I		C	
S	T	A	T	E	S	I	D	E		P	E	A	K	E
			E				E				N			
S	C	A	M	P		P	R	O	C	E	D	U	R	E
	H		P		T		A		A				E	
M	E	L	O	D	I	S	T		P	O	L	I	S	H
	A		R		S		I		I		A		O	
S	P	O	I	L	S	P	O	R	T		D	O	L	L
	E		S		U		N		A		E		V	
E	N	T	E	R	E	D		F	L	A	N	N	E	L

Minnesota Rollercoaster

Michael Kernan

WOBEGON BOY
By Garrison Keillor
Viking. 305 pp. $24.95

ONE WANTS to call Garrison Keillor the Norman Rockwell of writers, but his work has shadows and depths that Rockwell would never dream of. In the front of his new novel, Wobegon Boy, along with the list of his seven books comes a bogus list of projects: "Alternative Geography," "Problems in Modern Life" and so on, and something called "Snow Gently Drifting in the Hemlock Bushes and on the LP Gas Tanks." This last is vintage Keillor: at once celebrating nostalgia and hooting at it.

In Wobegon Boy, Keillor recounts a life familiar to his radio listeners, as in the persona of John Tollefson he escapes Minnesota only to wind up running a public radio station in upstate New York. He falls in love with a city woman but feels rootless and unfulfilled in his yuppie bachelor existence. And then he returns to Lake Wobegon, and the book takes wing.

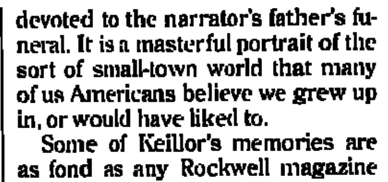


ILLUSTRATION: ERIC WHITE

Now, I am probably in a minority here, for though I can't get enough of the Keillor stories on tape, I find his written version of the same material much less effective. It may have to do with missing that attractive, seductive, homeboy voice with its slight Minnesota accent. It may be that the written language is more formal. Here's his description of the Wobegon watering hole: "I looked down along the bar of the Sidetrack Tap, the dark oak scratched and gouged, the sky-blue Hamm's globe revolving over the backbar, and the Pabst lantern and a miniature Schmidt's beer wagon pulled by six white horses and a Wendy's lighthouse with a circling beam that reflected in the brass trim. Men leaned on their elbows, their faces seamed and shadowy. Clint Bunsen and Carl Krebsbach sat together, leaning against the bar, their heels hooked on the barstool rungs."

A straight descriptive passage: Keillor fans know the Bunsens and Krebsbachs, and the scene itself is classic Americana. But if the story were being told to us orally, we would have gotten to the action by now, and we would have had to imagine the seamed and shadowy faces for ourselves. Time and again in Wobegon Boy we meet characters we know through the tapes — notably Lena and Bruno the Fishing Dog, the stars of my all-time favorite Wobegon yarn — and for me at least the sparkle has gone out of them when I see them fixed on the page. But there is still a lot of life in this book. We get a string of Wobegon anecdotes in Keillor's trademark rambling style, full of verbal footnotes and parentheses. In fact the entire second half of the book is devoted to the narrator's father's funeral. It is a masterful portrait of the sort of small-town world that many of us Americans believe we grew up in, or would have liked to.

Some of Keillor's memories are as fond as any Rockwell magazine cover; sometimes a pervasive sourness shows through. "Talk radio is part of the tide of dreariness slopping across America. Franchise architecture, generic shopping malls, popular music as ugly and empty as it's possible to be, and talk radio . . ."

We are charmed by his Wobegonians, but we also are invited to snicker at them and their hayseed ways. "Mildred had lived in Argentina for 30 years. She missed Minnesota, according to Ray, missed birch trees, snow, hydrangeas. She subscribed to Reader's Digest and ordered Jell-O and tapioca pudding and Kraft macaroni and cheese dinners from a wholesale grocer in Texas."

Is that fond, or is it deadly? I suspect that the author has similar ambivalences about his own small-town childhood. You could write a book about his references, spoken and written, throughout his career, to Jell-O alone. It's one of his leitmotifs. It seems to represent something about America or possibly life itself, ridiculous but dear. Well, I don't want to land too heavily on this wonderfully readable tale. I read it nonstop, soaking up the Lake Wobegon stories, and in the pages devoted to the father's death and funeral I think Keillor has risen to a height that he achieves only rarely. Like Thornton Wilder, he appears to ramble on for pages about this and that, entertaining us but not moving us, and then suddenly, at the very end, he pulls everything together and gives meaning and brightness to all that has gone before.

Alive and Kicking in Hong Kong

Peter McCarthy

HONG KONG BABYLON
An Insider's Guide to the
Hollywood of the East
By Frederic Dannen and Barry Long
Miramax/Hyperion. 412 pp. $18.95

AMERICAN audiences can't get enough Hong Kong cinema. True, The Bride With White Hair may not be coming to a theater near you any time soon, and Sex And Zen can be difficult to find at the local Blockbuster, but the Hong Kong influence is being felt in Hollywood, and indeed the world. Directors such as John Woo (Broken Arrow, Face/Off) and stars such as Jackie Chan (Rumble In The Bronx, Supercop) have taken America by storm, playing major roles in many of the studios' highest grossing films.

And while the Hong Kong influence is most readily identified in thrillers, it is not limited to that genre. Quentin Tarantino chose Wong Kar-Wai's Chung King Express, a deliberately paced, meditative, Godardian film for American release by his production company.

In November New York's Film Forum, generally regarded as an "art house theater," held its annual Hong Kong Film Festival under the apt title "A Cinema in Transition." Everyone, it seems, is smitten with the Hong Kong style, though few are aware of the country's rich and varied cinematic history.

Hong Kong Babylon should go a long way toward correcting this situation. Frederic Dannen, a staff writer for the New Yorker whose articles have also appeared in Vanity Fair and the New York Times, has written a timely, ambitious and well-researched book. Filled with facts, anecdotes, interviews, synopses and criticism, Hong Kong Babylon serves, for the uninitiated, as a wonderful introduction to the genre. And for die-hard enthusiasts it provides a depth of detail rarely seen in other, similar books that seek simply to explicate and glorify the "gals, guns, and gangsters" aesthetic.

The opening section, an expanded version of an article Dannen wrote for the New Yorker in 1995, serves as the meat of the book. Dannen exhibits patience and insight as he details the history of Hong Kong cinema, a history he views through a cross-cultural lens. It seems Hollywood and Hong Kong go way back: The first Hong Kong feature film was financed with American money; its first major star, Bruce Lee, was born in San Francisco; and many of its more prominent films are unabashed "adaptations" of American films. The current, in-vogue aesthetic — dark and violent — draws many of its elements from American film noir and gangster pictures of the '50s. It becomes plain to the reader that the current Hong Kong invasion is predicated on a rich, past cross-cultural mingling.

Dannen also provides the reader with the requisite context in which to place these films. His detailed examination of the triads (Hong Kong mafiosi) and their influence on the film industry sheds much light on a studio system that is second only to the United States in the number of films it exports annually. Many of the major players in the Hong Kong film community, it seems, are accomplished hoodlums as well as producers.

In the third portion of the book, Barry Long, a former manager of Kim's Video, an underground store in Greenwich Village, provides concise, knowing and often deliberately ludicrous synopses of some 300 of the best and often oddest of Hong Kong's celluloid offerings. An example is Long's synopsis of Naked Killer:

"A young woman named Kitty kills her father's murderer, making a favorable impression on Sister Cindy, a professional hitwoman, who adopts her as a pupil. Kitty finds herself the object of desire of a traumatized cop who throws up at the sight of a gun, and Sister Cindy's ex-pupil, a lesbian assassin with a contract on her former mentor."

Though Long's notes are enlightening and quite fun to read, another book, Sex And Zen & A Bullet In The Head by Steffan Hammond and Mike Wilkins, which limits its focus to short blurbs of Hong Kong titles, may be of greater use to readers seeking an introductory guide to what is available on video.

The final segment, in which 12 major film theorists and critics — among them Dave Kehr, Andy Klein and Law Kar — muse on the relative merits of Hong Kong films, exposes the book's primary weakness. Unfortunately, this portion of the book lacks focus, and most of what the critics have to offer feels rehashed at this point. Dannen, Long and the stars of the cinema itself have previously explained nearly every anecdote, story line and production horror story, and when those pieces of information are recycled and placed in the context of theoretical analysis, they simply fall flat.

The truth is that while Hong Kong Cinema may lend itself to lofty thoughts of postmodern deconstruction and analysis of complex morality in a cinema of violence, the book would have been better off keeping its footing light and leaving the heavy theorizing to Film Comment. It is also unfortunate that Dannen completed this book before Hong Kong's reunification with China. He touches briefly on the reunification and, particularly in the interviews, the profound ramifications it is sure to have on the film industry, but the topic receives merely a cursory examination and one is left wanting more.



John Woo: His films have taken Hollywood by storm

A Private Nirvana

Mike Musgrove

PINK
By Gus Van Sant
Doubleday. 260 pp. $21.95

THE GHOSTS of River Phoenix and Kurt Cobain drift through director Gus Van Sant's first novel, a low-key, quasi-science fiction meditation on death that is illustrated with original sketches by the author. They aren't identified by name, but there's no mistaking 23-year-old Felix Arroyo, who dies from a drug overdose after collapsing in front of a club before the action of the novel begins, for anyone but River Phoenix, one of the stars of Van Sant's 1991 film My Own Private Idaho. And there's no mistaking Blake, a famous-too-fast rock star who loses his passion and kills himself, for anyone but Kurt Cobain.

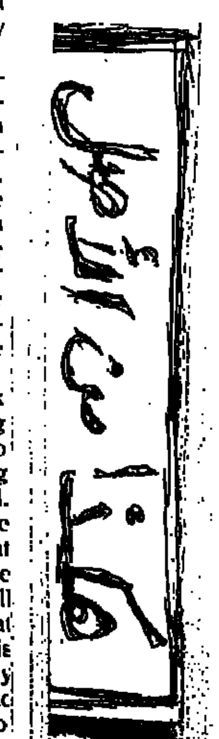
Spunky Davis is a middle-age director of infomercials who lives in Sasquatch, Oregon, and feels detached from the world. He divides his time between working on a screenplay that he hopes will bring him the fame and fortune he deserves, and brooding over the late Felix Arroyo, who had been a close friend as well as one of the hottest stars of his half-hour-long commercials.

One day, Spunky's path crosses that of a mysterious duo: a young film-school student named Jack, the spitting image of Felix (who always wanted to be a filmmaker), and his hard-drinking friend Matt, who turns out to have an uncanny resemblance to, yes, the dead rock star Blake. Jack and Matt are strangely reluctant to reveal their last names or where they live. When they're not sitting around talking about movies they want to make, they tend to disappear for days on end.

These two aren't your usual, run-of-the-mill slackers. They're slackers who are able to travel through time and space by enveloping themselves in a dimension called Pink. Why pink? Perhaps because, as the Matt/Blake/Cobain character puts it, "Pink is a color that marks the highest degree of awesomeness or perfection." Or because pink is the color "in utero," which is a reference to an album by Nirvana, the real Cobain's band.

Van Sant shares the story of Jack and Matt only in tiny, unsatisfying scraps, but it all has something to do with a realization that young Felix had before he allegedly died. What Felix figured out was that "the aliens are really us." It turns out that there is a more highly evolved race of human "aliens" that lives all around us on this planet, a race that exists in a dimension where there is no time and no death. The aliens try to encourage the rest of us along to the next level, but most people, of course, aren't able to see or understand.

Unfortunately, Van Sant doesn't use Pink to explain Pink to the masses; the novel's science-fiction aspect is never fleshed out enough to seem anything more substantial than idle wishful thinking. What very little the reader actually sees of Pink is virtually indistinguishable from the dimension previously inhabited by Kurt Vonnegut's Tralfamadorians. Not that there's anything particularly wrong with that, but it's so distracting that one almost expects Billy Pilgrim to come bobbing along at any moment.



In Brief

ROLLS-ROYCE may have to pay out millions of dollars in commissions to a company believed to be owned by a member of the Saudi Arabian royal family. The action is connected with the Al-Yamamah arms deal.

AFTER 160 years, the name of Hambros as an independent entity was scratched out as the beleaguered City of London merchant bank confirmed reports that its core business is being sold to Société Générale for $460 million.

THE 190 partners at Goldman Sachs are expected to enjoy bonuses of up to $15 million each as profits at Wall Street's last major partnership topped a record $3 billion.

J P MORGAN, the US securities house, has been fined a record $580,000 by the Stock Exchange after being found guilty of manipulating the market.

THE UK government is to offer tax relief on donations to educational and anti-poverty projects in the world's poorest countries in an effort to ease the crippling debt burden in the developing world, Chancellor Gordon Brown said.

THE gap between UK top earners and people at the bottom of the pile narrowed this year for the first time since 1979, according to figures released by the Employment Policy Institute. Meanwhile official figures showed that in September, for the first time outside war conditions, more women had jobs than men.

MERRILL LYNCH, the US broking and banking group which trades one in every four shares on the London stock market, predicted that the FTSE 100 would hit record levels in 1998.

TENS of thousands of jobs in the European defence industry were secured when Spain, Germany, Italy and Britain signed a $65 billion deal in Bonn to build the Eurofighter.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates December 20	Sterling rates December 18
Australia	2.5498-2.5543	2.4859-2.4893
Austria	20.75-20.77	20.32-20.34
Belgium	60.88-60.95	60.07-60.17
Canada	2.3878-2.3897	2.3172-2.3198
Denmark	11.24-11.25	11.00-11.01
France	9.88-9.89	9.67-9.68
Germany	2.9500-2.9528	2.8892-2.8921
Hong Kong	12.92-12.93	12.65-12.68
Ireland	1.1425-1.1446	1.1227-1.1249
Italy	2,895-2,899	2,831-2,835
Japan	215.05-215.33	213.44-213.70
Netherlands	3.3245-3.3280	3.2557-3.2593
New Zealand	2.8571-2.8903	2.7576-2.7628
Norway	12.09-12.10	11.87-11.88
Portugal	303.42-303.75	295.40-295.74
Spain	250.21-250.51	244.58-244.89
Sweden	12.91-12.93	12.64-12.66
Switzerland	2.3830-2.3860	2.3330-2.3361
USA	1.6668-1.6690	1.6326-1.6335
ECU	1.4919-1.4936	1.4650-1.4666

FTSE100 Share Index down 101.6 at 5020.2. FTSE 250 index down 57.9 at 4706.1. Gold up $6.50 at $289.25.

IMF issues warning on Asian crisis

Mark Atkinson

THE International Monetary Fund issued a stark warning this week that the Asian financial crisis could turn into an unnecessarily "deep, prolonged and self-reinforcing" downturn which could herald a return to protectionism.

It also absolved George Soros — blamed by the Malaysian prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad, for causing the crisis — by saying that speculators had played a "relatively limited" role.

The IMF, taking the highly unusual step of issuing an updated global economic forecast — the last time it did so was after the 1987 stock market crash — admitted that it had vastly underestimated the impact of the crisis when it published its original projection in October.

Instead of world output growing by 4.3 per cent in 1998, it would now expand by only 3.5 per cent, if not lower.

The IMF said: "As the episode continues to unfold, there are clearly downside risks, especially in view of the vulnerability of banking systems in some countries and the powerful financial linkages that exist across countries.

"Policymakers will need to respond forcefully to forestall an unnecessarily deep, prolonged, and self-reinforcing downturn, which might seriously undermine support for an open world financial system and foster protectionist sentiment."

Anxiety is growing that Asian companies will seek to use their devalued currencies to flood the West with cheap goods. Last week the head of Ford's global operations warned that the crisis would undermine efforts to encourage free trade and may lead to political tensions.

The international lending organisation said that Southeast Asia and Korea — where the IMF has been forced to lend nearly $100 billion in the past few months to help countries stabilise their currencies and pay off short-term debts — would be hit the hardest, followed by Japan, while the United States and Europe would emerge relatively unscathed.

In Britain output is predicted to rise by 2.4 per cent next year, 0.2 percentage points less than in October. However, the IMF said this "cautiously optimistic view" hinged on Asian countries implementing "without undue delay" economic and financial reforms to prevent the crisis spreading to other emerging markets and beyond to advanced economies.

On the emotive issue of speculators such as Mr Soros, the IMF said they might have determined the timing of the outbreak of turmoil in some countries. But it added that those who profited "did so primarily by correctly perceiving unsustainable and inconsistent economic policies, financial sector fragilities, and overvalued property and stock markets.

"Some speculators, however, appear to have made large losses in some operations. More generally, foreign investors in Asian emerging markets have taken substantial losses".

The IMF said there appeared to have been three key domestic factors that led to the crisis: first, the failure to dampen overheating pressures in Thailand and other countries in the region; second, the maintenance for too long of exchange-rate regimes pegged to the US dollar, which encouraged excessive borrowing in foreign currencies without regard to exchange rate risk; and third, lax prudential rules and financial oversight.

"All these factors led to repeated attacks on the Thai baht and then on other currencies in the region."

The IMF said that although the roots of the crisis lay in the countries most affected, developments in advanced countries and global markets had also played their part.

Stock markets around the world took another pounding last week as news of Japan's third-largest bankruptcy sparked fresh waves of selling by already nervous investors, *Mark Tran in New York and Mark Milner write.*

The Tokyo stock market tumbled more than 5 per cent and the fall-out in the Far East quickly spread to Europe and the US.

In London on Friday last week the FTSE 100 share index closed 148.1 points down on the day at 5,020.2.

The renewed turbulence in the Far East was triggered by the bankruptcy of food group Toshuku, the ninth publicly quoted Japanese company to fail this year. Its difficulties served as a reminder of the problems facing Japan's corporate sector in the face of a struggling economy.

Asia's markets "seemed to be a bit more stable in the last few days, but that was apparently an illusion," said Peter Lindquist, an analyst at HSBC Midland Bank. "This is still likely to create downside pressure for yields."

Tokyo was not the only Asian market in trouble. Hong Kong's Hang Seng index was down almost 350 points on the day, and the Seoul market lost 5 per cent amid concerns that little will be done to tackle South Korea's economic woes until newly elected president, Kim Dae-jung, takes office in February.

Prudential reprimanded for management failures

Teresa Hunter

THE reputation of the Prudential, one of Britain's biggest financial institutions, was severely damaged after it received the most swingeing public rebuke ever delivered by a City watchdog last week.

The $165 billion Prudential Corporation was reprimanded for being a business out of control, "with deep-seated and long-standing management failures", in the first disciplinary action to be taken by the UK's new Financial Services Authority.

This humiliating reproach is a serious setback to an institution which owns 4 per cent of British industry and which earlier this year engaged in takeover talks with the NatWest Bank and the Woolwich. It bought a highly regarded life and pensions company, Scottish Amicable, in September after a battle with the Abbey National.

The embarrassment is compounded by its high-profile, $30 million, television advertising campaign portraying the "Man from the Pru", chief executive Sir Peter Davis, as a friendly, trustworthy uncle.

Sir Peter, who last year earned more than $1 million, promised viewers he was "dedicated to bringing the best possible returns from the safest possible investments" and pledged "to keep your dreams alive".

But it emerged last week that thousands of customers have been sold the wrong policies because of misdemeanours by the company's 5,500 sales force. The worst offences related to the sale of its core insurance policy, the Prudential Savings Account, which the company now accepts was unsuitable for many customers.

The FSA, which is headed by former Bank of England deputy-governor Howard Davies, was set up by a Labour government determined to stamp out the malaise at many of the nation's best-known financial institutions. It lambasted the Pru for:

- ❑ deep-seated and long-standing failure in management, which prevented it recognising its shortcomings;
- ❑ a cultural disposition against abiding by consumer protection laws;
- ❑ failing to remedy shortcomings pointed out by previous watchdogs;
- ❑ selling unsuitable products;
- ❑ failing to put investors' interests before those of the company:
- ❑ failing to establish and maintain adequate controls.

Mr Davies said: "We are satisfied that the Prudential's conduct has fallen substantially below the standards that the public has a right to expect from a regulated firm."

The problems came to light during an inspection by regulators in 1995, at a time when Sir Peter's predecessor, Mick Newmarch, boasted on a number of occasions that the Pru had never "mis-sold" a policy. It subsequently admitted to more than 70,000 potential cases of pensions mis-selling.

In August, it was forced to double to $750 million the sum set aside for compensating pensions victims. It said last week that further redress would be paid to any of its other 6 million customers who had been sold a wrong policy.

Yet, despite a number of requests from the watchdogs, it failed to put its house in order and was even accused of obstructing inspections.

Sir Peter, who was appointed by the Chancellor to take charge of the welfare-to-work programme, finding jobs or training for 250,000 young people, expressed regret. "We have had a lot to put right, but no one should doubt the strength of our determination to ensure that we have the best industry practices in terms of selling and compliance," he said.

Not so smart . . . the Smart car on show in Zürich PHOTO: MARTIN REUTSCHI

Moose upsets Merc again

MERCEDES, once a byword for German quality engineering, suffered renewed ignominy and ridicule last week when a second new car failed the infamous moose test, *writes David Gow.*

The car firm admitted it had been forced to delay the launch of its revolutionary Smart car, being developed with Swiss watch-maker Swatch, by six months until next October.

Like its other entry to the small car market, its A-Class, the micro car flipped over during the Swedish "moose test" designed to ensure a car's manoeuvrability in severe conditions — such as swerving to avoid a moose (or elk) lumbering across a forest road.

The delayed launch of the 2.5-metre long, 1.45-metre wide two-seater Smart, a rival to Ford's Ka and Rover's Mini, came as a further blow to the profit and sales expectations of Daimler-Benz, Mercedes's parent. The group's shares suffered accordingly in Frankfurt.

It is yet another dent in the reputation for top-class engineering and reliability nurtured over decades by the firm.

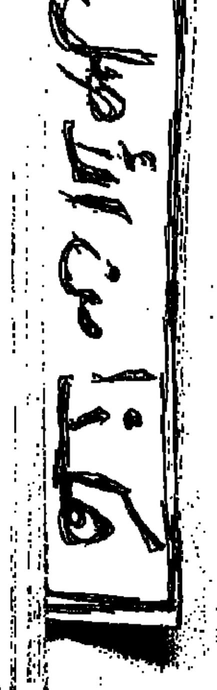
Last week's crisis led to the removal of Johann Tomforde as head of the Smart research and development team. He is to take up "other duties" at Micro Compact Car (MCC), the joint venture between Daimler, which owns 81 per cent, and Swatch-makers SMH, which owns the remaining 19 per cent.

Nicolas Hayek, SMH chairman, said: "We will make it somewhat wider."

Mercedes was also forced to widen the wheel-base of its A-Class and fit electronic stabilisers as standard parts to try to win back confidence after thousands cancelled orders. It has since passed the test with flying colours.

CLASSIFIED

CAR HIRE



Buried deep in the Internet is information you want. **Jack Schofield** on how search engines are designed to help you find it

The new seekers



ILLUSTRATION: BILL BUTCHER

THE world of Internet search engines is changing fast. Instead of merely being like airports or railway stations, dispatching surfers to various parts of the Internet, search sites such as Yahoo! and Excite want to become destinations, like America Online (AOL) and the Microsoft Network (MSN). And that's not just because indexing the Internet is increasingly becoming a hopeless task.

"Search engines are immensely useful in the chaos of the Internet, but at the end of the day, what these guys want is to increase the number of eyeballs that linger on their site," says Don DePalma, an analyst at US-based Forrester Research, "because the only way to make money at the moment is by selling advertising impressions."

In fact, two of the leading search engine sites now reject the label. Iain Osborne, marketing director of Yahoo!'s European operation, says: "I don't like being called a search engine. We are not a search engine, and we never have been a search engine: we're an Internet media company."

While it's possible to dismiss Osborne's complaint as semantics — Yahoo! is a hierarchical directory of Web sites created by human beings, rather than an index compiled by software robots called "crawlers" or "spiders", like Alta Vista — he is making a serious point. Yahoo! is just as much a "media property" as, say, TV Times magazine, except that it's not published on paper. And it's a valuable property, serving up more than a billion pages a month, and pulling in $24 million in advertising in the first half of this year.

Yahoo!'s basic approach to categorising Web sites hasn't changed since it started in a trailer at Stanford university, California, as Jerry's Guide to the World Wide Web. The company's co-founders, postgraduate students David Filo and Jerry Yang, pooled their hot-lists of favourite sites and started dividing them into directories when the volume became unmanageable. Excite — which was also formed by former students from Stanford university — has arrived at the same point from the opposite direction.

It was founded in a garage in Cupertino, California, in 1993 as Architext Software, and its clever idea was to create a search engine that could create abstracts and do subject-grouping automatically. Architext changed its name to Excite Inc when it launched its search site in October 1995, and Excite stopped calling itself a search engine earlier this year.

Yahoo! has generally led the way. It stopped being just another directory when it introduced a Reuters news feed late in 1994. It continued to diversify by adding weather information and share price quotations, and more recently it has gone into online shopping via a deal with Visa, the credit card company. Users can personalise the system to their own needs with My Yahoo!.

In October, Yahoo! responded to Excite's free e-mail service by buying Four11 — known for its "white pages" directory and RocketMail free e-mail — for shares worth $92 million. As a result, it now offers most of the things people want, apart from free Web pages.

Excite offers similar facilities, including an online chat service, a bulletin board and free e-mail. Like Yahoo! it has localised versions for different countries, and can be personalised via My Excite. Earlier this year, it reorganised its directory listings into a series of TV-like "channels" covering different subject areas such as business and sport. Last month, to counter Yahoo!'s move into commerce, it bought NetBot for its shopping utility, Jango, and launched a Business & Investing Channel with the backing of Intuit, which sells Quicken finance software.

Lycos — one of the oldest search engines — is now trying to catch up fast. It introduced more powerful Lycos Pro search software in September, and has since added its own channels, called Web Guides, along with chat facilities, free e-mail, and customised news.

But not all the leading search engines have taken this route. Infoseek has decided to "stick to its knitting", according to Paul Zwillenberg, managing director of Associated Newspapers Innovations, which runs Infoseek UK. So has Alta Vista, which is owned by US-based computer manufacturer Digital Equipment Corporation, and Inktomi, a spin-off from research at the University of California's Berkeley campus funded by America's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). Inktomi created the popular HotBot search engine on Wired's HotWired site. Microsoft is now licensing its technology to build a search engine for MSN, much as AOL used Excite's.

It's a useful reminder that other types of site are converging on the same strategy as Yahoo!, Excite and Lycos. HotWired, for example, started as a spin-off from a trendy print publication, and AOL as an online service for tyros. They have different demographics, but both want to provide a home from home for Internet users, grab their eyeballs and sell them to advertisers.

This convergence means AOL is now competing with Excite, "even though we own a piece of them," according to Jonathan Bulkeley, the managing director of AOL UK. "They're moving up the food chain," he says, "and we're moving down the food chain."

Calafia Consulting's Danny Sullivan, creator of the highly regarded Search Engine Watch site (searchenginewatch.com), is dubious about the trend for search engines to turn themselves into amusement parks. "I don't know if that's what people want," he says. "It still seems to me that people want to search the Internet. Look at Alta Vista: it only really offers searching and it doesn't do much advertising but its popularity keeps growing by word of mouth."

Worse, Sullivan suspects that the major search engines are not keeping pace with the growth of the Web, or with changes in technology that make the Web harder to search. Sullivan points out that search engines typically index 50 million Web pages, which was reasonable when the Web had 100 million pages (no one knows the real figure), but it's a diminishing proportion of a Web that's heading for half a billion pages. "There's the attitude of 'Well, we can't index everything'," he says. "The chances are you'll still find what you're looking for, but the real value of search engines is that they bring to the table things you wouldn't otherwise find."

But many search engine users complain that they get "too many hits", and few can be bothered to improve their search techniques to get better results. The trend is therefore towards trying to limit the number of sites to the better quality ones, even if that means picking them by hand.

Zwillenberg says Infoseek UK is "trying to bridge the two approaches by having a big search engine" combined with human editors who review sites for their "relevance and quality to British surfers". This also enables Infoseek UK to take a "family-friendly approach: we don't take adult advertising, and we try only to list family-friendly sites," he says.

The problem of selection is acute for Yahoo! since it has a near monopoly of the hierarchical directory search market: as Robert Reid says in his book, Architects Of The Web, "Yahoo! is like the sole table of contents in a book with many indexes." Companies that are left out or mis-filed can be bitter about the real or imagined loss of business that rejection entails.

"For business users, I think we're going to have to come up with something more punctual and more precise," Yang says. "There probably will be some level of express service that may involve fees, but this is just purely conjecture. It's something we have to think about."

However, for consumers, Yang reckons the real challenge is creating a user experience that makes people feel comfortable on the Internet. "And that's easier said than done," he says.

Search me

AltaVista
www.altavista.digital.com/
Launched: December 1995
Spider: Scooter
It tends to produce many obscure references, especially in unskilled hands, but the Live Topics search feature may make things easier.

Excite
www.excite.com/
Launched: October 1995
Spider: Architext Spider
Arranges results in order of relevance, and if it finds what you want, you can click to get "more like this".

HotBot
www.hotbot.com/
Launched: May 1996
Spider: Slurp the Web Hound
Its index is excellent, and the menu system makes it the easiest place to do complicated Boolean searches. But the colour schemes sometimes seem to be designed for people wearing Raybans.

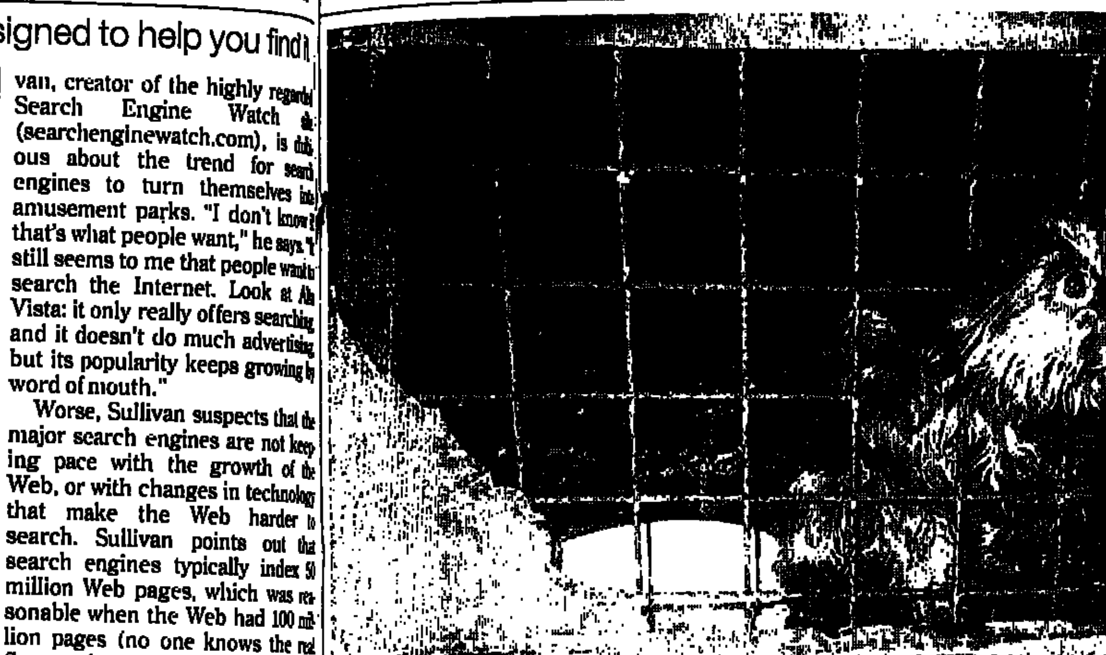
Infoseek
www.infoseek.com/
Launched: February 1996
Spider: Side Winder
A hybrid service that now offers 15 "intelligent channels" and a search engine that can accept plain text queries, even if it doesn't always find the answers.

Lycos
www.lycos.com/
Launched: May 1994
Spider: T-Rex
It also offers "channels" called Web Guides, and includes a directory of sites rated as being in the top 5 per cent.

Yahoo!
www.yahoo.com/
Launched: after April 1994
Spider: none
Yahoo! is by far the Web's largest hierarchical directory and lists more than 500,000 sites in 14 main categories. It links to other search engines to provide Internet searches, with Alta Vista being the first choice.

Simple tips

[illegible]





03

Canine suffering: puppies rescued by the RSPCA from Welsh puppy farms where conditions were described as appalling

The puppy farms that breed misery

Rory Carroll

HUNCHED inside a British pet shop cage, rheumy eyes peering through the bars, the puppy looks the embodiment of loneliness and innocence. He is neither of these things.

Rewind six weeks and watch as he is born in a converted cowshed in Wales teeming with dozens of diseased, yelping newborn dogs, all entering the same multi-million pound industry of the puppy farms.

Factories would be a better word, for the puppies are products, bought and sold for profit, exported and made to order.

Credit card in hand, you can phone your nearest dial-a-dog dealer, express your preference and wait for delivery, just like pizza.

You may not get what you pay for. Pneumonia, pleurisy, diarrhoea, worms, vomiting blood, skeletal deformations and huge vets' bills are not part of the deal but can come included in the price.

Dissatisfied customers have the option of returning their purchases and seeking a refund, but those who try usually falter when they see the conditions to which the puppy is returning.

According to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, breeding farms are often cramped, dirty, dark and rife with sickness. Hereditary diseases are passed on by exhausted bitches which, like battery hens, are mated as often as possible, producing two or even three litters a year. Some are held down by pitchforks to be forcibly mated.

Earlier this month Mike Hall, Labour MP for Weaver Vale, published a private member's bill to shut illegal puppy farms and improve welfare standards of registered commercial breeders. Mr Hall's Breeding and Sale of Dogs Bill would also outlaw the sale of puppies to pet shops and unscrupulous dealers.

Like the anti-hunting issue, Labour promised such a measure if it was elected, and like the anti-hunting bill, the Breeding and Sale of Dogs Bill is likely to fail because the Government will not give it parliamentary time.

So it is business as usual this Christmas and indefinitely for the hundreds — no one knows how many — of puppy farms dotted all over Britain. Under the Breeding Dog Acts 1973 and 1991 farms with two or more breeding bitches are supposed to obtain a licence from the local authority. Many do not.

Nor does the licence guarantee good care since the yearly inspections are carried out by planning officers concerned with structural surroundings, not vets checking the dogs' welfare.

Three Welsh areas alone — Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire — have 260 licensed breeders, with unlicensed breeders probably doubling that figure, according to the RSPCA.

Previous estimates that about 70,000 farmed puppies are bred and sold each year are well off the mark, says the Kennel Club. Noting that the UK population of 6.9 million dogs remains stable, the club has just produced a new estimate based on the number of dogs which must be coming on the market each year to replace those that die.

"We registered 273,341 puppies last year, but I'd say there were another 420,000 that weren't registered," said a club spokesman, Brian Leonard.

Even allowing for privately bred pets that suggests an industry, assuming the average price of a pedigree puppy to be £250, worth upwards of £80 million.

Little if any of that money is used to improve the conditions in which the animals live, says A J M Robson, a vet who has inspected dozens of licensed and unlicensed breeders.

Bizarrely, puppy farms are reported to have been the brainchild of the Department of Agriculture. Animal welfare groups say that in 1982 government advisers urged Welsh dairy farmers to breed dogs as a way of supplementing income hurt by dwindling milk quotas. The department was unable to confirm or deny the allegation.

True or not, the industry is now clustered in south and west Wales and provides the main source of income for many farmers turned breeders.

Prices in London pet shops range from £275 for a King Charles spaniel to £350 for a Staffordshire bull terrier. Buyers in Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan, where increasing numbers of puppies are flown, will pay more than £1,000.

A Country Diary

A K Hellum

SHERWOOD PARK, Alberta: awaking to see the first shades of grey upon the eastern sky, I noticed how silent it was. Normally, the chickadees and redpolls hover busily around our feeders just outside the window, eager to devour their store of sunflower and niger seeds. But not today.

As dawn developed into day, I could make out the small birds flitting about in the shrubbery some distance away. Then I saw the tiny Northern Saw-Whet owl, sitting on the rope line to one of the feeders, dozing.

The temperature remained an inhospitable -30C as morning wore on, and the small birds became more aggressive, some of them flying around the small spruce tree to which the owl had moved. The small birds were very restless, flitting about, but too timid to feed because of the presence of their larger relative. But the owl appeared to be unaware of the feverish activity.

Then suddenly the owl opened its eyes wide, stared northwards towards the snow-covered ground and flew off. I craned my neck to see what it was doing. It had caught a mouse feeding on dropped seeds and then proceeded to fly back to its perch in the spruce tree. There it commenced to eat its breakfast.

During the next couple of days, the owl continued its dawn visitations, intent, it appeared, on catching more rodents. The small birds did not seem to interest it at all even though it is said to feed on them.

Meanwhile the silence grew deeper as each day dawned. By the third morning the redpolls had all but disappeared, probably having moved to other feeding areas, but the chickadees were bolder. The nuthatches and the downies remained skittish.

On cold winter mornings now, when the bush is so still you can hear your own breathing, I stop and wonder how little I really know of what goes on out there.

Letter from Northern Territory Jon Marston

Aboriginal rites of passage

ALONG with the dust storms that roll into Papunya from the western desert of Australia during the summer months come an assorted collection of vehicles. These vehicles range from the latest four-wheel drive models to the unbelievably broken-down remnants of 1970s saloons. The people, cars and trucks come from all over central Australia and represent groups of Aboriginal communities. The relationship between the groups are complex: some are related by blood, several by language, and some through a kinship system which takes years to begin to understand.

In a scene reminiscent of a photograph I had once seen of French Gypsies setting up camp, a scattered collection of corrugated iron and large squares of plastic were soon gathered and made into a camp. Babies and old people disgorged from the vehicles into these shelters, along with essential supplies of food and water needed to sustain everyone over the uncertain time ahead.

Although I have witnessed several of these mass influxes that seem to appear overnight in Aboriginal communities, I am still in awe of the effort and organisation that lies behind these movements of people over hundreds and, for some, thousands of kilometres of hostile desert.

The force that lies behind these feats of endurance stems from the ancient tradition of initiation ceremonies for the young men of the Aboriginal communities in central Australia. The energy behind this mass translocation derives its sustenance from the deep need of central Australian Aborigines to give the sacred laws of their creation to the present generation of men.

Living in Papunya is a useful and at times provocative contrast to the beliefs and value systems that I grew up with in 1960s New Zealand. A few broken-down houses and the skeletal remains of 20th century technology that lie discarded around this community impress on me that the materialistic culture of Australia has only a fleeting interest for many Aboriginal people. Their links with this land extend back many thousands of years, long before Europeans started to collect things and claim ownership.

In Aboriginal society individual ownership has never taken hold as an idea because, traditionally, nobody really owns anything apart from their own dreams. The term ownership is now used by various Aboriginal groups when negotiating with the government over land rights, but it is in my experience that they use the word in a way that is strange to them but conveys the strength of their feelings in the only terms that non-Aboriginals understand. A more correct English translation to describe the feeling many Aboriginal people have for their country would be "protection" and "guardianship".

The process of male initiation that occurs in a sacred place in the bush is a secret one. And it is to be respected as that. The symbolism behind the physical alteration of the boys' anatomy is now better understood. The boys are separated from their female carers and, like some other traditional groups around the world, go through a ritual death. The process is apparently terrifying (according to my friend Jampijinpa), but the boys are supported through their ordeal by a ceremonial "brother". During the rituals that re-enact the verbal teachings of their origins (frequently referred to as "dreaming"), blood is spilt and the symbolism of unity with the earth is powerfully demonstrated.

During the weeks spent in the camp the boys begin the lifelong process of learning the laws that govern their life, the stories of creation, the penalties for disturbing the ancestors, and the rites for the continued fertility of the land and its people.

The boys are what they call "getting men". The young men emerge from the bush camp transformed in the eyes of their family and the community. In effect they have been reborn as holders of the sacred laws of their ancestors. The men who last week were just boys must now behave in a responsible way towards their relations.

The ceremonial elders who guard over the traditional law in central Australia have come and gone. The initiation of the boys was carried out on Christmas Day during a raging dust storm. The paradox of such an event taking place on December 25 did not escape me. A 2,000-year-old celebration of the birth of one child was perhaps echoed here in the bush by the spiritual rebirth of a new generation of Aboriginal men. These youngsters are now guardians of a spiritual life that has safeguarded their ancestors in a hostile environment.

LA's palace for the people

The billion-dollar Getty Center opened last week. **Jonathan Glancey** on a heavenly new attraction above the City of Angels

SAM RODIA, an émigré Italian plasterer, built the Watts Towers single-handedly between 1921 and 1954. These batty, 100ft-high iron spires encrusted with shells and fragments of glass and china are among the most popular artworks in Los Angeles. Or at least they are among the poor, the dispossessed, the panhandlers and teenage street gangs who have taken them to heart and can visit for free.

Watts is an area visitors to LA are advised to avoid, and few of the people who hang out there spend much time in the city's more overtly sophisticated cultural hotspots. The impressive Museum of Contemporary Art, (MOCA) designed by Irata Isozaki, is located in the downtown district, yet like most museums and galleries in LA, it costs $6 to get in.

The most ambitious home to the arts yet to be built in the United States, and probably anywhere in the world, the Getty Center, opened its many doors earlier this month. Like the Watts Towers, entrance is free. The trustees of the Getty are doing everything they can think of to encourage the gangs of young blacks and Hispanics who pose by Rodia's eccentric masterpiece to come up and see some of the world's great art, or simply to chill out on its majestic terraces — some of the only public spaces in this city of fast-moving streets and gated malls — in the hope that the effect of great art will rub off on their broad young shoulders.

The $1 billion Getty Center, in the making for the past 15 years, has been built on the top of a hill in Brentwood, LA's most exclusive suburb, best known until now for former residents Marilyn Monroe and Nicole Brown Simpson.

Now any Angeleno can come up and gaze out over the whole of their many-centred city from the latter-day Acropolis, Italian hill town or Hadrian's Villa (it's all of these) the 63-year-old New York architect Richard Meier has dreamed up majestically for the J Paul Getty Trust. Will the kids from Watts come?

The people at the Getty hope so, but can't be sure, so I decide to go and ask them, dropping downhill to Watts from Brentwood in a Japanese cab driven by a Spanish-speaking Ukrainian. Half of those I talk to have heard of the Getty. The rest should have. Posters throughout the city announce "Explore . . .", "Discover . . .", "Your Getty Center". Whose Getty Center?

"S'nothing to do with me, man," says Noah, a hulking 18-year-old dressed like some medieval Japanese warrior. "It's up there, y'know, for the folks on the hill. It's for white people, man, not for us people here in the city." Noah's fellow dudes agree.

"We've hit the headlines", says John Walsh, director of the Getty Museum (the heart of the 24-acre Center), "with the fact that the Getty Trust has spent $1 billion on the buildings. What's less known or appreciated is the fact that we've spent a further $1 billion on creating research and most importantly outreach education programmes that will, we hope, make the Getty Center accessible to anyone."

To kids like Noah?

"Oh, definitely," says Walsh, a gentlemanly and good-humoured Bostonian. "The idea of the Getty Center is a deeply old-fashioned one; it's quasi-evangelical. We believe art and culture are good for people, that people rich or poor are redeemed in some way by art, and we intend to get that message across to Angelenos and to the world. This isn't a mausoleum for the rich."

Visible from much of Los Angeles, the Getty Center is breathtakingly big, handsome, beautifully built and, in its own noble terms, very convincing. Meier, continuing Walsh's educational theme, describes it as a "campus". Few university buildings, though, boast the luxury of courtyards clad in travertine, the most beautiful marble in the world, lush garden terraces and a complex interlocking of buildings that look, at first, as if they have been shaken over the sun-drenched site like dice from the hand of a money-no-object Las Vegas gambler.

Close up, the Getty proves to be a sort of giant compendium of world culture, a museological encyclopaedia, and at times an indulgent box of chocolates. The museum, designed to take into account the attention span of a generation of Californians brought up to channel-hop through more than 50 trashy TV stations, contains works of art ranging from the sublime to the kitsch.

You can wander aimlessly through rooms dressed up in the style of Louis XIV, making little or no sense of outlandishly over-restored regal beds draped in silk and capped with ostrich feathers; you can snoop at the ill-fated Marie Antoinette's boudoir decor; and then find yourself surrounded just as easily by magnificent illuminated manuscripts from 12th century Byzantium, elaborate medieval German glass, an opulence of Titians and Tintorettos.

Yet, whenever you feel you have seen too much, Meier's architecture comes to the rescue. Whenever museum fatigue threatens, visitors can escape into courtyards, or on to balconies, and gulp in the magnificent views over the Pacific Ocean or the snow-capped mountains beyond. This is when you begin to recognise the physical genius of this place. This is art and architecture as fairy godmother.

AND YET, even if it does alter the game plan of one teenage gang member, even if it does help cultural research and conservation programmes around the world (and, boy, does it spend generously on these, from Mexico to China via rural Pakistan), the Getty is still an enormous conceit — the vanity of riches writ as big as the famous illuminated "Hollywood" sign that blinks over Tinsel Town at night, an overblown memorial to a less than attractive family.

"You mustn't be too hard on the Gettys," says Walsh. "How money was earned and a rich family's private history are one thing; how that money is being spent now, something else. In fact, old man Getty's wilfulness as a patron hasn't been a bad thing; I'm rather glad we've got things here, a glorious mix of artworks and artefacts, that we modern art professionals would probably have turned our noses up at.

"Getty was certainly shrewd; he got to know what he liked and, unlike, say, Randolph Hearst, the newspaper magnate, he didn't allow himself to be sold pups."

Such faith in Getty's powers as a collector was questioned earlier this month by the allegation, made by a former British Museum curator who has worked at the Getty since 1994, that some of the works on display are fakes. Nicholas Turner's legal suit against the centre, in which he is also claiming sexual harassment, will no doubt drag on for months but is unlikely to bother management significantly.

The one thing that could put paid to this breathtaking project is an earthquake. There is something touching in the faith of those who have chosen to spend $1 billion-plus on a shrine to the arts which could, if nature turned nasty, as it did here in 1994, tip the whole caboodle on to the snaking freeways and coyote-patrolled ravines below. Los Angeles was never a sensible place to raise a city and certainly not one of this mind-boggling scale. Yet, who could resist its balmy climate? The clear skies have all but clouded over with smog since, yet LA continues to grow and draws émigrés and would-be stars like a magnet. Art centres too.

Anyone who comes here can feel like a duke or duchess for the day. It costs nothing to get in (although you'll need to book your car into the giant car park buried under the hill two weeks in advance) and visitors are free to wander in and out of the buildings, restaurant and cafés, to lounge on the liner-like terraces or to wander around the circular garden shaped by Robert Irwin, the celebrated installation artist.

"It doesn't matter", says Walsh, "if, on their first few trips, visitors don't get to see or learn all that much. We want people to have a good time, so that they come again and again. This is not meant to be an elitist arts organisation."

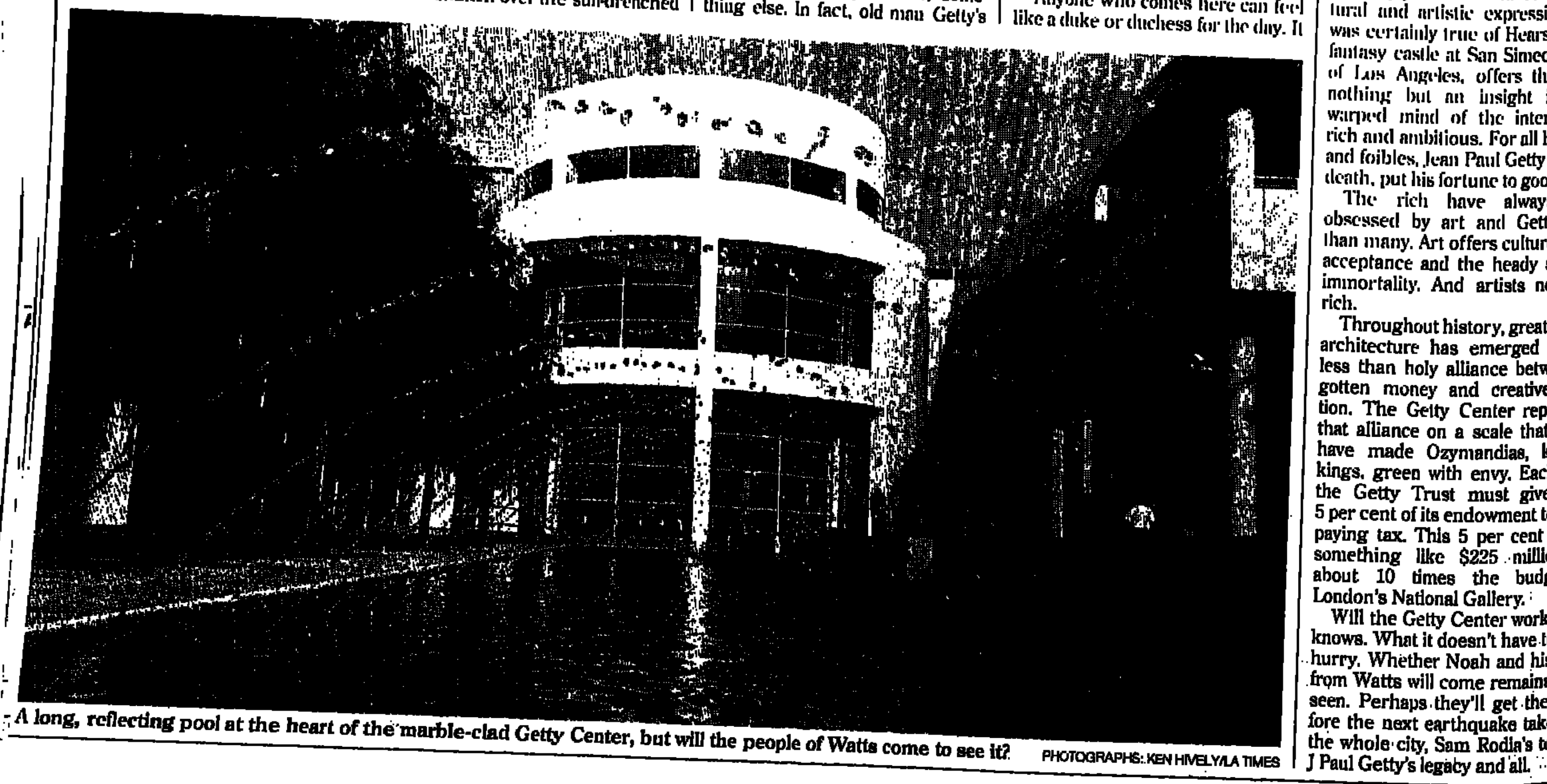
Room by room, building by building, the Getty Center really does have something to offer almost everyone, whether their interest is early Renaissance Italian painting or street-wise fashion and photography. Walsh, a former curator of painting at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, explains that the core idea "is that everything connects, and that we value all art forms equally. No one can tell us what to do, where to go or threaten to cut our funding. I guess this remoteness or freedom from public funding could mean that we are seen to be entirely removed from everyday social concerns, that we stand too far apart, yet equally that's our strength. This is a place to dream and to take risks as well as to teach and learn."

The dreams of billionaires like Getty have a habit of going wrong, or simply end in fatuous architectural and artistic expression. This was certainly true of Hearst, whose fantasy castle at San Simeon, north of Los Angeles, offers the public nothing but an insight into the warped mind of the interminably rich and ambitious. For all his faults and foibles, Jean Paul Getty I has, in death, put his fortune to good use.

The rich have always been obsessed by art and Getty more than many. Art offers culture, social acceptance and the heady scent of immortality. And artists need the rich.

Throughout history, great art and architecture has emerged from a less than holy alliance between ill-gotten money and creative ambition. The Getty Center represents that alliance on a scale that would have made Ozymandias, king of kings, green with envy. Each year, the Getty Trust must give away 5 per cent of its endowment to avoid paying tax. This 5 per cent equals something like $225 million, or about 10 times the budget of London's National Gallery.

Will the Getty Center work? Who knows. What it doesn't have to do is hurry. Whether Noah and his gang from Watts will come remains to be seen. Perhaps they'll get there before the next earthquake takes out the whole city, Sam Rodia's towers, J Paul Getty's legacy and all.




A long, reflecting pool at the heart of the marble-clad Getty Center, but will the people of Watts come to see it? PHOTOGRAPHS: KEN HIVELY/LA TIMES

Hi-de-highbrow

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

THE very first line of The Prommers (Modern Times, BBC2) was "Can you form a queue?" Can they queue? Is Beethoven decomposing? Prommers can queue in their sleep. If there were prizes for queueing, they'd be first in the queue.

At some point, possibly their finest hour, the English became world-champion queuers. As Mark, the steward who had called for a queue, explained, "We put the white lines down to say, 'Hang on a sec! We've done this just to be fair. This is England'." He wore a red coat and an air of unpunctured patience, and he could sing Just One Cornetto — which gave the whole business of queueing for the Proms an air of Hi-de-Hi for highbrows. Which it is.

The Albert Hall, he said, used to run with blood, but once the hall was divided by a white line everyone fell into place. The season ticket-holders (sandals and socks) stand here and what they call the day trippers (sandals and no socks) stand there.

The Proms run for a couple of months and serious prommers queue every day. It helps to have no other commitments. A temporary village evolves on the pavement and, as Agatha Christie showed, that means murder. Sue, who has been a season ticket-holder for 30 years, knows all the traditions — she invented most of them. She was repelling saucy boarders: "Some bugger tried to overtake me. I told him: 'You don't overtake!' And you don't sit down on the rail. It is promenader tradition. It's Just Not Done."

"Balls!" she cried suddenly. Aniseed balls are also a tradition.

All this crystallises to diamond on the last nights when, to secure at place at the front, they have to sleep out all night. Sue had an inflatable tent to repel pigeons ("They walk about the pavements at 4am") but she got little sleep as she was patrolling the pavement all night, confirming her suspicion that one couple had sneaked off to bed. "If they're not prepared to play by the rules, they will be knocked off and their faces will be clocked for future reference." When Adam and Alice reappeared in the morning, they had their buttons snipped off. Adam said it seemed silly to sleep out when they lived down the road. Alice said: "It's a cliquey thing. If you're not in with them, they oust you." All of which was perfectly true and quite irrelevant. Gold Stick in Waiting seems silly, but we are talking tradition here.

Prommers tend to be retired, redundant, unmarried and, somehow, slightly surplus to life's requirements. Some unexpected alliances are formed. John (ex-army and an ex-monk) and Susie (a young German student) met in the queue last year. John said: "She is the best music librarian I've ever met." It seemed modified rapture, but they exchanged engagement rings.

As with all fine documentaries — and the director Helen Richards deserves credit for this — something moved under the surface like a pike in a pond. Something was being said a little lower than your hearing level but, now and then, you caught that unvoiced whisper. Who are these people? Why have they constructed this little world of precedence, exclusion and etiquette? It is a reconstruction of a world that no longer exists. On the last night the veteran prommers dressed as if for dinner. The orchestra played "I vow to thee my country". Sue's face melted. And then, you felt, the ship went down.

Eagle (BBC1) was, photographically, the most breathtaking of the Wildlife Specials and Fred's favourite by far. Fred being my mynah.

The cameraman, Mike Richards, (Sir Gordon's boy, of course) is terribly tiny but utterly fearless. He obviously rode on the neck of an eagle to catch that look of terrible intensity as the questing head turned this way and that, seeking whom it might devour. The land was snatched away from beneath him and the only noise was a sound like washing flapping in the wind. Sometimes he climbed out on the wing, sometimes he looked the eagle full in the eye. When you're Mike's size, that is, frankly, foolhardy.

Eagles will eat anything. Kangaroo, snakes, monkeys, fish, termites, tortoises, a monkey's tail: "This remarkable view of an eagle removing a monkey's tail is now, sadly, a rare sight." Not so sad, I imagine, if you're the monkey. ("Bugger me, mother, did you see what that bird just did? Thank God it's a rare sight.")

Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Hossain Sabzian in the charming The Taste Of Cherry

The conman's tale

CINEMA
Derek Malcolm

ABBAS KIAROSTAMI was the co-winner of the Palme d'Or at Cannes this year for The Taste Of Cherry, and thus cemented his position as Iran's foremost director of international standing with authorities who at first didn't want the film shown at all. He is indeed an extraordinary film-maker, and the earlier Close-Up, at last being shown in Britain, is one of his most endearing, as well as cleverest, works.

At first, as with a lot of his films, you wonder what all the critical fuss is about. A journalist is seen in a taxi on the way to cover the arrest of a con man, Hossain Sabzian. He believes he may be on to a big story. In the back of the car are two mute soldiers, due to do the arresting. He's got a faulty tape recorder and he wonders how on earth he'll find another one. They can't find the right address and the taxi driver hopes they're capable of paying the fare.

This quite extended sequence is a bit boring, but still manages to tell you more than a little about life in Tehran. And so does the proper story, which is not boring at all when it gets going.

It transpires that a poor man, who is unemployed and thus can't look after his family properly, has persuaded a well-heeled middle-class family that he is Mohsen Makhmalbaf, a real-life director much loved by the Iranian public for films such as The Cyclist and Gabbeh.

He's told them he wants to make a film in their flat and garden, and also borrowed money from them. Gradually, getting suspicious and seeing a photograph of the real Makhmalbaf, they report him to the police. Arrested, he goes on trial.

Meanwhile, hearing this slightly absurd story, Kiarostami decides to make a documentary about the case.

So this is a film within a film, and it talks eloquently about film-making, truth and reality. But though this is intriguing, it is the hesitantly told story of the impostor Sabzian — observed being interviewed on a bus where he first says he's Makhmalbaf to his neighbour and at his trial — that makes this such an affecting work.

The man, beautifully played by Hossain Sabzian himself, loves watching films and is desperate for some kind of self-respect. In front of a surprisingly kindly and fair-minded people's court judge, he pleads that he really would have made the film if only he had the money, even though he'd never held a camera. Besides, he meant to hurt no one.

Observing him closely, Kiarostami turns him into that most vulnerable of would-be heroes — the man who begins to believe in the lies he has told. You want him not to be punished, imagining with foreboding a fundamentalist legal system where a sin is definitely a sin.

The film's investigation of Sabzian and his effect on those around him is humane, generous and seems charmingly without guile, even when it is in fact being very guileful. And it ends with a small masterstroke, as Kiarostami, the documentary-maker, finds that his sound system has broken down at the climactic moment when our hero meets and embraces the real Makhmalbaf, who takes him off to apologise with flowers to the family he's conned.

For Kiarostami, this is almost a private moment of redemption. Even so, it brought tears to my eyes and ends a film which seems to say that we're all actors in one way or another.

Check morality at the door

THEATRE
Michael Billington

AFTER the synthetic cynicism of Chicago, **The Front Page**, running at the Donmar Warehouse in London, is the real thing: not just the best of all newspaper comedies but a superbly crafted play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur that shows how the amorality of reporters interested only in scoops feeds off the corruption of city officials concerned only with votes.

The central dilemma revolves around star reporter Hildy Johnson, torn between love for his future bit-champing bride and loyalty to his ferocious editor, Walter Burns; and when Hildy finds himself with a fugitive cop-killer secreted in the roll-top desk of the Chicago Criminal Courts press-room, it doesn't look much of a contest. As Burns says: "This ain't a newspaper story — it's a career."

Hecht and MacArthur were both former Chicago reporters; and they are wickedly funny about their sleazy, misogynistic and self-dramatising trade. The newspapermen play cards, crack wise, invent stories and treat the intended 7am hanging of the killer as a matter of personal inconvenience. Burns is also one of the great monsters of American comedy.

But the power of the play lies in the way Hecht and MacArthur show just what breeds this professional cynicism. Chicago in 1928 is seen as a city bubbling with graft and corruption. The Republican mayor and sheriff want the killer, who has bumped off a black cop, hanged in order to maximise the black vote in the upcoming election. They also play up the Red scare, and, in the most heartless move of all, subvert the reprieve from the governor by seeking to corrupt his messenger.

This is the choicest moment of all in Sam Mendes's delicious, highly atmospheric production. Neil Caple makes the most of the minor role of the messenger as, offered one bribe after another by the mayor and sheriff, he stands in an agony of indecision and, the opposite of a drowning man, sees the whole of his future life passing before him.

If I have any qualm, it is that Griff Rhys Jones's built-in amiability makes him a slightly improbable Hildy. But he is very funny, not least when, attempting to hide the runaway killer, he has to cope with recalcitrant blinds.

Short of being Walter Matthau, Alun Armstrong is also just about as good a Burns as you could hope to find. With his heavy, potato-shaped head and lethal moustache, he embodies all the cynicism of a character who mutters, of a diabetic aide: "I ought to know better than to hire anyone with a disease." And there is excellent support from Lizzy McInnerny as a Clark Street tart and from Adam Godley as a prissy newsroom poet. Mark Thompson's set, with its atmosphere of decay and its torn pin-ups, is also a model of journalistic seediness.

Lyn Gardner adds: To Wilton's Music Hall in London, to see Fiona Shaw perform Eliot's 1922 poem, **The Waste Land**. Walk through the door of Wilton's near Tower Hill and you face the City's history. Fiona Shaw stands upon the stage of the world's oldest music hall. Nobody has performed here since 1880. Since then it has been a mission hall and a rag warehouse. It is cold and smells damp. The paint peels. The gold, papier-mâché moulding on the balcony is rotting. You are advised not to lean on it.

From the back of the auditorium Shaw looks a tiny figure. Then she opens her mouth and it is as if she is in your face. "April is the cruellest month" is the bored shrug of a society hostess. A few minutes later she is the gossiping snitch, a Cockney neighbour greedy for hot gammon. Image piles upon image. Some lines are so familiar they are like advertising slogans. The surprise of it is that Shaw makes it so funny.

She performs the poem as if it is music. She is only part of the orchestra. Jean Kalman's lighting, which throws huge shadows, is another; the building itself yet a third. It echoes with its own ghosts, just as Eliot's poem is haunted by the dead and the not yet living, of cities past and present. This is theatre as architecture and architecture as theatre. And whatever you call it, it is an awfully big adventure.

Thirty-seven minutes whizz by and yet seem to encompass an eternity. The ending is also the beginning. "Shantih. Shantih. Shantih." The peace which passeth understanding.

Afterwards it is out into the gathering gloom. The river flows ever onwards. Time stands still.

Unquenchable thirst for freedom

David Harrison

An Embarrassment of Tyrannies
Edited by W L Webb and Rose Bell
Gollancz 347pp £20

Banned Poetry
edited by Peter Porter and Harriet Harvey-Wood
Index 192pp £7.99



JOHN MORTIMER once wrote that the price of freedom is perpetual fussing. Silence — the absence of fussing — is the dictator's friend. An Embarrassment Of Tyrannies, a compelling collection of articles, poems and stories spanning 25 years of the dissident's mouthpiece, Index on Censorship, is a stark reminder of how much fussing still needs to be done.

We might have thought that much of the world's tyranny ended with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. But new tyrannies have emerged and older ones have sharpened their instruments of oppression. Fighting censorship and other human rights abuses can be a lonely and depressing experience, encapsulated in the dissident's toast: "Let us drink to the success of our hopeless endeavour." But the strength of the struggle is testimony to man's spirit and thirst for freedom. I have asked dissidents from China to Africa and Colombia what drives them on through persecution, torture and public indifference, and the reply is always the same: "Because without freedom, I have nothing."

I remember Wang Dan, a leader of the Tiananmen Square protests, sitting in his tiny Beijing apartment in 1994 and gesturing towards the two "secret" policemen down below — who were unaware of my presence there — and telling me with stark simplicity: "I know they will send me to jail again, but if I give up my fight then I accept their tyranny." Wang Dan went back to jail last year.

Where free speech is banned, oppression can only be exposed from the outside. This is where Index on Censorship has played a crucial role since it was founded by Stephen Spender in 1972 after Soviet dissidents protested against show trials in Moscow. The anthology boasts an impressive list of writers, including Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Nadine Gordimer, Dario Fo, Arthur Miller, Vaclav Havel, Wole Soyinka, Noam Chomsky, Juan Goytisolo and Arthur C Clarke. Their work covers a wide range of human rights abuses in predictable places such as China, the old Soviet bloc and Bosnia, but also more insidious forms of oppression in Western democracies such as Britain and the United States.

The 25 years since Index was founded have seen remarkable and unforeseen changes: the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the end of apartheid in South Africa, and nascent democracy in Argentina, Chile and Eastern Europe. But some of the more recent pieces in the collection serve as a reminder that there are still many abuses to expose. They also highlight modern threats to freedom of speech, including the claims of religious fundamentalists and the growth of euphemisms to sanitise the horror of war — a sinister lexicon which reduces civilian casualties to "collateral damage", chemical weapons attacks to the harmless-sounding "CWs" and hides the word "kill" behind absurd "synonyms" such as "interdict", "degrade", and "cleanse".

The anthology mixes intellect and passion. Ronald Dworkin sets the philosophical framework, arguing that freedom of speech is not a relative but an absolute principle, and a "condition of political legitimacy". He warns that we should ignore the seductive call of those who would limit that freedom simply to silence the voices of hate.

The spirit is taken up by Ivan Kraus in a bitingly ironic letter to the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, advising him that, really to stop the spread of anti-government sentiments, he should abolish all books, since even copies of the leader's autobiography could be arranged to make subversive words. Kraus finishes with a recommendation that the alphabet be abolished. "That is the only way we can achieve socialism quickly and without risk."

Ceausescu is dead but many of the other articles concentrate on unfinished struggles, in Bosnia, Nigeria, China and Indonesia. There is no room for complacency. Index must continue to shine its light on the barbed wire, the torture chamber and the censor's blue pencil.

It does just that in another publication, a whole edition of the magazine devoted to old and new poetry that has been banned. Banned Poetry contains work from poets who have faced exile, imprisonment and poverty because of their work. Their publishers have been jailed, their printing presses seized and yet, as the editors point out in the introduction, this is "a perverse tribute to the power of poetry".

They say the poems have not been selected simply because the writers have suffered but because they have genuine artistic merit. This is more true of some than others, but the volume includes many compelling works that transcend the poet's immediate situation to become poignant anthems to dissidents' suffering and resistance.

The late Nigerian poet Ken Saro-Wiwa gives us "Corpses Have Grown":

Corpses have grown
And covered the land.
The xylophone of the deceased chief
Is still, has forgot the past.
Ancestral spirits driven from home
Walk tearful abroad.
The orphaned land weeps

And this from Goran Simic's "Sarajevo Spring":

It is spring again. The spring is coming.
It is coming in
On crutches. Swallows nest in the ruins.

There are shafts of humour shining through the bleakness — in the work of Allen Ginsberg, for example. But the fact that Ginsberg's two poems in the magazine still cannot be broadcast on daytime radio or TV in the United States, and that the Chinese poets, Liu Hong Bin and Yang Lian, cannot publish their poetry in China remind us that there is still a long way to go.

Thrillers

Chris Petit

Five Past Midnight, by James Thayer (Macmillan, £16.99)

ENJOYABLE — if improbable in execution — ripping yarn from Thayer, author of the excellent White Star, who posits that the Yanks inserted an assassin into the chaos of Europe in the spring of 1945 with orders to kill Hitler. Unlikely nick-of-time escapes and superman heroics held in check — just — by thorough research of Germany in collapse.

The Enumerator, by Agnes Bushell (Serpent's Tail, £8.99)

BUSHELL'S post-Aids, alternative San Francisco — a rich stew of blood lust, hypocrisy and death, Star Trek re-runs, queer outings, and a promise of love — proves as arresting as her tattooed heroine's foreground investigation into a gay murder that is imaginatively executed — corpse as floral display.

Beneath the Blonde, by Stella Duffy (Serpent's Tail, £8.99)

BARELY recovered from her last scarring (a recurrent theme), Saz Martin pursues a celebrity stalker whose creepy floral tributes to an emerging band's female singer turn nasty when the back of the songwriter/guitarist's head is stoved in with a baseball bat, a case whose whys and wherefores amount to less than Duffy on the music biz and lesbians.

Vanishing Point, by John Nichol (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99)

AS an ex-RAF flier Nichol writes brisk, no-nonsense prose, in part based on his own experience as a Gulf war PoW, and allied to a serviceman's familiar outrage at what the high-ups get away with; *plus ça change*. Gulf War Syndrome and hush-ups around Iraqi chemical weapons — the latest thriller touchstone — are the causes of major indignation.

The summit of everyone's ambition

Jonathan Tinker

The Death Zone
by Matt Dickinson
Hutchinson 211pp £16.99

Chomolungma Sings the Blues
by Ed Douglas
Constable 226pp £18.95

EVEREST is everyone's mountain. Although regarded by many climbers as a circus and unrepresentative of their sport, because it is the highest it is probably the only mountain that a non-mountaineer can see the point in climbing. With half the available oxygen that we breathe here at sea level and temperatures dropping well below freezing, even the base camp on Everest is a place where human beings can live for only a few months. On the summit it is inner space and you can measure your survival time in hours.

And yet still the Westerners come — to test themselves against the mountain or to use it as the focus for a trek. It is a metaphor and a very big lump of the earth that will not go away. Seven hundred and twenty-six people have now climbed Everest (rather more than twice the number of people who have climbed all the Munros and "tops" in Scotland) and countless numbers have trekked within sight of it.

Matt Dickinson, a distinguished adventure film-maker with almost no climbing experience, was commissioned to film Brian Blessed's third attempt on Everest, following the way up the Tibetan North Ridge on which Mallory and Irvine died in 1924. Reality hits the 60-year-old Blessed, who makes a dignified withdrawal from the climb. A huge storm hits the mountain and kills 11 men and women on the Nepalese side, including Rob Hall, the doyen of Everest guides. Several members of an Indian expedition die on the North Ridge in a protracted and agonising tragedy. Dickinson, despite all this, consumed with summit fever and desperate to make his film, climbs to the summit almost in a frenzy, stepping past corpses and trying to persuade himself that the summit of Everest will stop his wanderlust and help his marriage.

Dickinson's book reads like a thriller, pacy and exciting, giving a good flavour of the sublime misery of climbing at extreme altitude. It is a real page-turner when he writes about his climb, fresh and vivid, but is less convincing when he turns to the history of attempts on the mountain and the lives of the local peoples.

The focus is almost entirely on the author and his struggle to reach the summit. The other Westerners are two-dimensional. This may be a reflection of the author's film background, in which too many personalities would be confusing for the viewer. Without that focus — some would call it selfishness — he may not have got up and down in one piece. The sherpas who led the way for Dickinson and his climbing partner, Alan Hinkes, barely rate a mention, yet it is obvious that it is they who get Dickinson and Hinkes to the summit. I would have liked to have read more about them.

Douglas's book, by contrast, is far more cerebral. A very accomplished climber and noted commentator on climbing-related subjects, Douglas is here more interested in the resonance that Everest has for both the local peoples and for visitors to Nepal and Tibet.

Not much happens: Douglas drives to the Tibetan base camp and wanders around the valleys near the Nepalese base camp. He writes elegantly and perceptively about the effects of tourism on Nepal, a country which still has a per capita average income of only $200. The ravages of pollution on Kathmandu, the end of the hippies and birth of "adventure travel" (no one calls himself a tourist in Nepal), the unique and tolerant mixture of religions, and the myth of rubbish on Everest are just some of the topics that are explored with a light and informed touch.

Chomolungma — Goddess Mother of the Snows, as the sherpas call Everest — is the brooding presence at the head of the valley that dominates the book. At one point Douglas says that he does not want to climb Everest. I do not believe him.


A dancer at the Mane Rimdu Festival, Thagyboche. From Heart Of The Himalaya by David Paterson (Jaico Books, £14.95)


Towards the end of his time? After the brilliant successes of the Rabbit series, Updike's reputation has taken a recent battering PHOTO: JUSTIN SUTCLIFFE

A roar of defiance against old age

Sex, underpants and age — **Joanna Coles** enjoys a conversation with John Updike as his latest chronicle of life in middle America divides the critics

JOHN UPDIKE is having trouble finding his room. We meet in the lobby of the Hotel Kitano on Park Avenue, and as we enter the lift he purposefully presses the 10th floor. Once we alight however, he seems suddenly lost. "Mmmn, this is not familiar," he worries, standing outside room 1001. "I'm sure I'd remember this number."

He slips in the keycard, but the door refuses to yield. He tries the next door but the lock-light stays red. Eventually, after another circuit, we are forced to call reception who tell him he is actually staying on the 16th floor.

As we wait for the lift again, he catches sight of himself in the chrome doors, his face a beige pancake from an earlier television appearance. "Oh dear," he giggles brightly, his jaunty green eyes staring back at him. "I'm looking rather chalky aren't I?"

Updike is old. Or at least significantly older than the writer who produced the brilliant Rabbit series, Couples and The Witches Of Eastwick. His latest novel, Toward The End Of Time, is in part a surreal voyage to a post-nuclear America recovering from war with China, and in part a voyage to the centre of Ben Turnbull, a 66-year-old retired banker living in Massachusetts, absorbed by his encroaching physical disintegration and impotence.

As always there are liberal sprinklings of Updikean sex. Various feminist readers have already accused him of chauvinism, pointing to his descriptions of sex with a young prostitute ("presenting me with the glazed semi-rounds of her tight young buttocks . . . the lovable little flesh-knot of her anus, suggestive of a healed scar") and his account of Turnbull's fumblings with a 13-year-old.

Though his features have long been chiselled into literature's Mount Rushmore, Updike's reputation has taken a battering of late and this, his 17th novel, has received decidedly mixed reviews. Writing in the New York Times, Margaret Atwood pronounced it "deplorably good". But in the New York Observer, David Foster Wallace declared Uppers was on his uppers. "It is, of the 25 Updike books I've read, far and away the worst, a novel so mind-bendingly clunky and self-indulgent that it's hard to believe the author let it be published in this kind of shape."

Oh dear. Settled safely on the sofa in room 1601, I am on the verge of asking Updike about these reviews when something catches my eye. Lying under the coffee table between us, presumably left there from the night before, is a pair of worn underpants.

This is both an unwelcome and unwitting intimacy and, given the book's infatuation with bodily functions, I find myself strangely alarmed. Should I pick them up and cheerfully throw them in a bathroomly direction, or discreetly nudge them out of view with my foot. Instead, momentarily thrown, I hear myself asking him about a line in the first chapter which reads: "Rapacity, competition, desperation, death to other living things; the forces that make the world go round." Does he really believe this?

"I think life has gotten much more brutish," he remarks, his white hair and dark suit settling into the sofa. "As religion's sanction for selflessness fades, I think people are hard-pressed to think of reasons to be selfless, and the sense of life as a struggle permeates.

"It's something I've noticed in my own children and stepchildren, as opposed to my own generation. It was fairly easy in the 1950s to buy a house and a car, and one spent time with one's family, one had a job and one went home. Now no one seems able to afford anything and yet they work all the time. Life has gotten much more brutish."

In Toward The End Of Time, that brutishness envelops everything, the protection services which have replaced the police and, of course, sex — one of Updike's omnipresent themes. Does he enjoy writing about it? "It's very healing, almost as healing as the act of sex itself . . ."

As he prepares to continue, there's a knock and a waitress arrives with tea. "Interviewus interruptus," he grins. "Do you find my make-up disconcerting? I still have it on but I could wash my face. I have a blotchy face and I think I should wear it all the time. It does me good."

We were talking about sex, I interrupt.

"We were trying to, weren't we? Ben's sex . . . sex is running out on him. Prostate trouble . . . but in his solitude he thinks a lot and he does a lot of sex. Funnily enough, as I was writing the book I wasn't aware there was a lot of sex in it, but it's been reviewed as a sexy book — and with indignation!"

Indignation? "That there's so much sex in this old fellow, horny Turnbull, and by proxy, me."

And? "I'm taking the writer's route," he chuckles darkly, "I do and can hide behind him. He and I share some things . . ."

Like a penchant for 13-year-old breasts which Turnbull fondles? "Writing a book is a very private act, you're not very inhibited, so it seemed to me very plausible."

It may be a private act, but publishing makes it public. "Yes, that's the paradox. Mmn, but I don't think about readers or reviews at all. I mean, Ben is a typical human male. Sex dies hard; even when the apparatus of sex fails, the psychological apparatus is still in place. He still wants affection, he still wants love. Men are rovers I think, in their minds and bodies, you know, a different biological mission."

HE'S beginning to sound like a Promise Keeper, I say, one of those rightwing Christians who recently marched on Washington promising to repent of their macho ways and retake control of the family. "You can't knock the cause," he retorts. "Men must — if we are to have a society at all — men must become civilised; tame their anarchic, savage urges. I'm all for what the Promise Keepers say, though their means aren't mine.

"All heterosexual males to some extent compromise. They give up some of our theoretical freedom for the joys of stable family life, and there are joys to it. There are joys to fidelity and not being in constant turmoil — and joys to parenthood."

Updike has four children from his first marriage. Was he a good father? "I was good in that being a freelance writer I saw a lot of them. I did some of the errands normally associated with suburban housewives: I did the car pools, I changed diapers. I had fun with them, but I didn't make them secure. Somehow I didn't, and I still don't, create that sense of shelter which maybe a real patriarch does. I acted like we were all in this together and that I didn't know what was going to happen next either. I was very preoccupied with my work and trying to make it as a writer — that took the basic energy. If I had to grade myself I would give myself a B minus."

'No one seems able to afford anything and yet they work all the time. Life has gotten much more brutish'

And as a husband? "It was a very good first marriage," he says gently. "It lasted a long time. We genuinely liked each other and we agreed about the importance of art. I'm not sure I could have become a writer without Mary; she gave me space to see what I could do. But again, I don't think I made her feel secure, and there was something skittish and boyish about me, which wore a little thin when I was in my 40s."

So what prompted their divorce after 24 years of marriage? "Other people. Other people as a symptom of not satisfying each other in certain regards. Also a boredom factor might figure. We married quite young [he was 21] and it was possible we had had enough. As a husband I would get a C plus."

It is, of course, in his meticulous descriptions of the stresses, the *frustrations* of middle American marriages that Updike remains unchallenged as a writer. But why, having escaped first time round, did he marry again? "I can't figure out another way," he grins darkly.

"I'm a marrying kind of man, I don't have the stomach for bachelorhood. I need the stability of marriage and my work demands it. Writing's a funny thing — to actually write, you need a certain routine and stability and dullness in your life. If your life isn't dull enough, you wouldn't need to venture into the realm of invented lives. But you must have some experience of the wilds or you won't have anything to write about. I'm a funny mix of the cautious and the reckless."

Does he sleep well? He pauses: "I wouldn't say I'm relaxed as I ought to be. I've slept very well for the last 20 years, but I seem to be nervous lately." About the book's reception, or something deeper? I ask, prompted by the description of Turnbull in chapter two, waking "with something undigestible gnawing my stomach".

"It might be writing this book which bears the sores of the elderly," he says flatly. "I never thought of myself as old until I wrote this book about an old man, and then I realised I'm only a year younger than Ben Turnbull. I can't believe this much of my life is over. I used to look at people my age and I would think how can they *stand* being that close to death without screaming in terror? And now I'm of that age. In some odd way you adjust to the proximity of death. But something else in you fights it."

We finish up by talking about what he's reading; "Wallace Stevens, and I finished The Sound And The Fury which I began 40 years ago. I'm not a good Faulkner reader, something about him puts me off, corny, long-winded."

As I stand up to go, he does too, and catches sight of his underpants. "Oh God," he cries, scooping them up and feverishly stuffing them, with a pair of worn black socks, into his suitcase. "How careless of me. I do hope it's not psychic litter."

Toward the End of Time (Knopf, $25) will be published in Britain by Viking in the spring

Hope springs in a Suffolk wetland

Mark Cocker

IN MANY ways the bittern is the most unlikely environmental celebrity you could imagine. Typical are the daft names by which it was once known to generations of country folk, my all-time favourite trio being Bitter Bum, Butter Bump and Bog Blutter. To many who heard its bizarre spring call, which is rather like the sound made by blowing into a bottle and is known as "booming", it was also a bad omen and cause for dismay.

Although we've now conquered these prejudices, there are other problems with its current flagship status, notably its invisibility. This is not just a question of rarity — although the current British population is probably less than 30 — it is also to do with the bird's legendary shyness. I live in the heart of Britain's bittern country and I average about one sighting a year. In more than a quarter century of ornithology I can recall just two observations that weren't of birds in flight and at considerable range. Ninety-nine per cent of the public will never see one, so the attempt to sell the story of its demise as a highly relevant national issue should have been mission impossible.

But during the last decade the eco-salesmen of the conservation community have made the bittern the most high-profile bird in the country. Its future, or lack of it, regularly finds its way on to the floor of the House of Commons. In East Anglia we have a railway line named after it. This year's major news was the £1.5 million paid out by the European Union's Life-Nature fund, and several other organisations have made smaller but substantial additional payments. Much of the money is now being ploughed into management of 10 wetland sites in East Anglia, stripping old reedbeds of decades of accumulated leaf litter, re-flooding new sites or cleaning out dyke systems.

At the Suffolk reserve of Minsmere, which belongs to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, they've gone further. The males' booming calls have been studied and recorded so that they yield a type of audio fingerprint. Most have also been banded with colour-coded rings, which enables individual identification, while several have been fitted with radio transmitters and sport a flexible 15cm aerial. This enables a research team to monitor their movements and plumb the mysteries of the bitterns' reed-enveloped lives. Testimony to how little this technology impedes their normal lifestyle is the tale of Alfie, one of two males at Minsmere and one of only 11 breeding males in Britain in 1997. Despite the hardware strapped to his leg, this two-year-old is believed to have mated with five females and fathered the nine young reared at the reserve this year.

The long-term goal of all this effort is a British population of 100 pairs by 2020. Yet even if one divides the EU grant by this putative 21st century total, bitterns still work out at £15,000 a brace. Tell that to the citizens of Albania or Moldova, two of the 16 European nations where bitterns are in serious decline, and they could well laugh in your face. But tell that to a Minsmere warden and I suspect he'd argue that safeguarding a single bittern protects entire communities of plants, fish, frogs, newts, dragonflies, otters and waterbirds.

In short, the bittern symbolises an entire wetland panorama. But it also implies a wider vision: that on one of the most densely populated and highly developed landscapes on Earth we can still preserve an environment that is worth inhabiting. The warden might well argue that, silly as it sounds, securing the Bog Blutter is about securing our own future.





ILLUSTRATION: ANN HOBDAY

Chess Leonard Barden

A BISHOP and a knight possess similar value in a chessboard point count. Most grandmasters pragmatically opt for the bishop in open play and knights in blocked positions, but a minority have a definite preference for one or other piece. Even at the highest level, Fischer is associated with bishop skill and Nimzovich with subtle knight tours.

The old tsarist player Tchigorin, who twice challenged for the world title, was reputedly a knight man, so when he became an icon of the Soviet chess school, grandmasters such as Bronstein and Petrosian were depicted as knight experts, and Tchigorin defences in the opening got special attention.

Perhaps it was all just propaganda, and recently there have even been claims that Tchigorin really preferred bishops after all; but one young talent took the legacy very seriously.

Alexander Morozevich was reckoned a future champion in 1994-95 when he won Lloyds Bank with one of the best rating performances in history. And Morozovich was a real Tchigorin fan, playing even the dubious openings of his hero such as 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6.

A narrow repertoire asks for trouble in these database days, and Morozevich's opponents soon found holes in his systems. Last summer at the world junior championship, he blundered a rook and the title to the American, Tal Shaked. But this classy win, also from the world junior, shows there is still hope; White's fine finish is based on the raking power of two bishops.

Morozevich v Socko

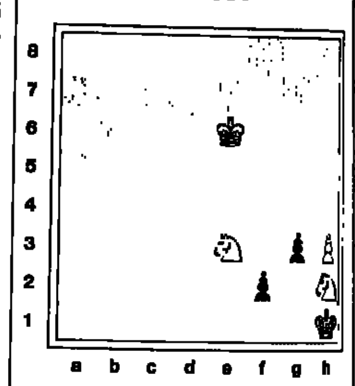
1 e4 e6 2 Qe2 A Tchigorin move which plans to meet d5 by exd5 and Nc3 or 2 . . . Be7 by 3 b3. **c5 3 g3 Nc6 4 c3 g6 5 Bg2 Bg7 6 f4 Nge7 7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 d6** Black's solid formation hopes to prove the WQ misplaced.

9 Na3!? An improvement on the book 9 Kh1, and of course a knight move. **e5 10 d3 f5 11 Be3 Qc7?!** Qc7 is one of the most misjudged moves by strong players who are not yet masters. It's too routine here, where Black should prefer Rb8 and b6 to keep a solid formation. **12 Qc2 Kh8 13 Nb5 Qd7 14 fxe5 Nxe5 15 Nxe5 Bxe5** A forced weakness, since dxe5 loses a pawn.

16 a4 a6 17 Na3 Qc7 18 Nc4 Be6?! Perhaps Black gambled that White would not exchange his beloved knight; Bg7 is better. **19 Nxe5 dxe5 20 Bh6 Rf7 21 Rae1 Ng8 22 exf5 Bxf5 23 Be3 c4** Be6 holds out longer.

24 Qf2! From now on, it's virtuoso bishops. White will meet cxd3 by 25 Bb6 Qe7? 26 Rxe5! Qxe5 27 Bd4. **Nf6 25 Bb6 Qd6 26 dxc4 Bd3 27 Rd1 e4 28 Bxe4!** Decisive. **Nxe4 29 Bd4+ Rg7** If Nf6 30 Rxd3 Raf8 31 Rf3 with a crippling pin. **30 Rxd3 Kg8** Or Nxf2 31 Bxg7+ Kxg7 32 Rxd6. **31 Bxg7 Resigns** If Qxd3 32 Qf7 mate.

No 2504



White to play and win (by Y Afek, New in Chess 1997). White's h2 knight is doubly threatened while the black pawns threaten to queen, so this is decidedly tricky. The solution takes only three moves to demonstrate, but is a stiff test of your creativity.

No 2503: 1 Rxc5! Resigns. If Rxf2+ 2 Qxf2 when (a) Rc6+ 3 Kh1 Bxc3 4 Rxc3! Rxc3 5 Qd4+ mates (b) Rd2+ 2 Rxc7 Rxf2+ 3 Kg3 and White's material advantage wins. Traps include 1 Re8? Rd7! and 1 Re7? Rxf2+!

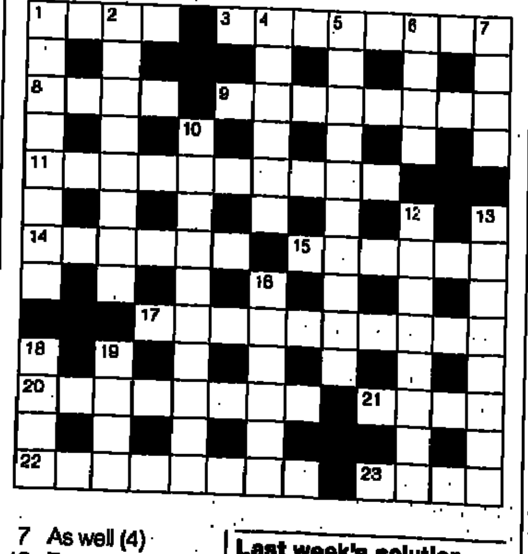
Quick crossword no. 398

Across

1 Secretive mollusc? (4)
3 Middle-European country (8)
8 Deceptive trick (4)
9 Lincolnshire resort (8)
11 Spotless (10)
14 Liquid measure (6)
15 Tension — melody (6)
17 Wok (or close) (anag) (4,6)
20 Make less offensive (8)
21 Round trip (4)
22 Furtive (8)
23 In the centre of (4)

Down

1 Bearing — vehicle (8)
2 Gathering (8)
4 Probable (6)
5 Plants (collectively) (10)
6 Strut at base of hull (4)
7 As well (4)
10 Female pupil (with complexion) (10)
12 Where boffins work (4,4)
13 Below the visible spectrum (5-3)
16 Electrical control (6)
18 Piece of music (4)
19 Piece of crossword (4)



Last week's solution

DRENCH PROSIT
E A O E E L R
PERPLEX MOUSE
I L L T U M N
CLYDE ROSEBUD
T G A E Y
OBSERVATORY
A A A A T
BULLDOG CARGO
L K E A I O B
ALARM NOTTOBE
Z N U T L S O
ENSURE OYSTER

Bridge Zia Mahmood

ON NOVEMBER 9, I asked readers the following question: what is the maximum number of points that North-South can hold between them, yet be unable to make a game contract in any denomination?

I'd like to thank all of you who replied — once again, your ingenuity proved equal not only to that task, but to solving some of the other, more difficult problems that I posed in the same column.

Mike Rattenbury, from Keighley, Yorkshire, sent in the following 39-point hand on which no game is makeable for North-South:

North
♠ AKQJ754
♥ AKQ643
♦ None
♣ None

West
♠ None
♥ 2
♦ 985432
♣ 1098753

East
♠ 1098632
♥ J109875
♦ None
♣ 2

South
♠ None
♥ None
♦ AKQJ1076
♣ AKQJ64

Mr Rattenbury points out that at no trumps or in either major suit, the defenders can lead a heart and will make three tricks in hearts and two in spades. In five of a minor, declarer must lose a trick in diamonds and two in clubs provided that a club is led.

To the question: what is the greatest number of points that North-South can hold, yet be unable to make game against any distribution (not merely the least favourable), Mr Rattenbury gives this combined 30-count:

North
♠ 6543
♥ AKQ
♦ AKQ
♣ AK9

South
♠ QJ
♥ J109
♦ J109
♣ 87654

It certainly appears that there is no distribution of the East-West cards that will allow North-South to make any game contract. I therefore declare Mr Rattenbury's solution to be the current world-record holder — unless someone can disprove it, or come up with an even stronger pair of hands!

A third question in the November column asked: what is the minimum number of points that North-South can hold, yet be able to make their chosen game contract against any distribution?

Mr Rattenbury and others gave the answer as six points, but Mrs Eryl Howard of Cambridge claims that the answer is five. If South holds:

♠ AJ1098765432 ♥ 32
♦ None ♣ None

then, says Mrs Howard, she can always make four spades against any defence — and that definitely looks plausible to me.

Next week's column will feature the Guardian Weekly's Christmas Bridge Competition. I can see that, judging by the quality of the letters I received in response to these November problems, I will have to make the Christmas puzzles pretty tough this year!

Football Premiership: Sheffield Wednesday 1 Chelsea 4

Chelsea's strollers on a high

Richard Thorner

AFTER the kicking from Leeds two weeks ago, Chelsea last Saturday were doubtless mightily relieved to face Sheffield Wednesday, who preferred the traffic-policeman style of defending — holding them up for a while before waving everybody through at will.

Wednesday were as light on the body as Chelsea were easy on the eye, four more goals making it 29 in the last 10 away matches. At times like this, Ruud Gullit, who has indicated that he will sign a new contract, must still believe that he possesses a side who can press Manchester United for the championship into the spring.

Beneath the hype of Ron Atkinson's arrival at Hillsborough still lies one of the more vulnerable defences in the Premiership, a Wednesday side who have leaked goals faster than anyone but their near-neighbours Barnsley.

Chelsea should have capitalised on that as early as the third minute. Even by Wednesday's standards, Jon Newsome's botched back pass after Gianluca Vialli had flicked on was horrendous, travelling no more than a few feet, but Gianfranco Zola, with time on his hands, drilled his shot wide. The more the misses totted up, the less they seemed to matter. Paolo De Canio — white-booted and loose-limbed — began at the height of his balletic powers, as if Chelsea's appearance demanded a performance. He hopped off for a while for ankle repairs after Michael Duberry's challenge, but returned still in the mood for dancing. From De Canio's free-kick, Andy Booth, of more pugnacious Yorkshire virtues, headed over.

Yorkshire vices included the crowd's mild booing of an old favourite, Dan Petrescu, whose game has advanced so markedly since his switch to Chelsea. He proved that by the manner in which he gave Chelsea the lead on the half-hour. Petrescu and Vialli, in turn, were repelled on the edge of the area, but Petrescu, assuming possession a second time, coolly swivelled to drill a shot low past Kevin Pressman.

It took a brave and well-timed tackle by Dejan Stefanovic to stop Chelsea going two goals ahead by the interval. Vialli's flick removed Newsome from the equation, but Zola was stopped as he bore down on goal. What followed, though, was pretty much a rout.

To be brought up in the seventies was to be raised knowing that Italian strikers were faultless assassins. Today's Premiership has both raised standards and exploded a myth. Vialli's spooned shot high over the bar after Frank Lebeouf's free-kick had defeated Wednesday's offside trap was a bad miss. Roberto de Matteo then released Zola, but Des Walker's excellent challenge deflected his shot over.

Such was Chelsea's strolling superiority that a second goal looked inevitable and it arrived 11 minutes into the second half, Vialli heading against the bar, but forcing the rebound over the line.

Chants of "Are you Tottenham in disguise?" followed Chelsea's third just after the hour. Vialli had two yards start on Ian Nolan as he pursued Leboeuf's through ball, and he needed every inch, having to check and turn inside before winning a penalty. Leboeuf smashed the ball low into the left-hand corner.

Wednesday did summon one response, a stunning finish by Mark Pembridge from 25 yards-plus. But their concerns lay in other areas. For all their improvement under Atkinson, defensively they remain a mess, as Chelsea proved with ease with their fourth goal when their substitute, Tore Andre Flo, curled one in from 20 yards. At least Wednesday fans could console themselves with the thought that his brother has yet to do that down the road at Sheffield United.

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Naseem retains his crown after a scare

BRITAIN'S Naseem Hamed beat off a strong challenge from American Kevin Kelley to retain his World Boxing Organisation featherweight title at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Hamed was picked off with ease in the early exchanges by the 30-year-old New Yorker, who put him on the floor three times — embarrassing for someone earning $2 million and eager to make a big impression — as the Briton's open defence appeared terribly inadequate against Kelley's wickedly accurate southpaw assaults.

Hamed, from Sheffield, went down in the opening round before both men hit the canvas in the second as the sparks really began to fly. Both inflicted further knock-downs in the fourth but when Kelley got up at the count of six, looking apprehensive, Hamed opened up again. When he struggled upwards again at seven, Kelley was in no suitable condition to continue the war of attrition and the referee called it off to give Hamed his 27th victory by a stoppage in 29 fights.

Hamed said afterwards: "Kelley hit me with some very good shots, but I had the heart of a lion and a champion, and came back. I came to his home, to the lion's den, still won and still got my belt."

Meanwhile in London, Robin Reid, from Runcorn, surrendered his World Boxing Council super-middleweight title to the 38-year-old South African Thulane "Sugar Boy" Malinga, who won on a unanimous points decision.

Champ: Hamed PHOTO: JOHN DUNN

SHEFFIELD, home to Naseem Hamed, Don Valley Stadium, the future National Ice Centre, two football teams, plus supporting acts in basketball, ice hockey, and rugby league, as well as world-class facilities for swimming and athletics, is also to get Britain's first sports academy.

To be built at a cost of up to $100 million from National Lottery money, the academy will be formally known as the UK Sports Institute, and should be up and running within the next couple of years. It will be the mother ship to a network of 13 regional centres to be developed from a further $165 million from the same source.

Sheffield beat off a tough challenge from a former USAF airbase at Upper Heyford in Oxfordshire and a development based around Nottingham for the right to play host to the academy. Chris Smith, Britain's Culture, Media and Sports Secretary, described Sheffield's victory as "an historic moment for sport".

He added: "Sheffield's challenge is to become the centre of a network of specialist sports facilities to help our top sportsmen and women and teams improve their performances and bring trophies and medals back to Britain. It will provide the very best in sports science, medicine, nutrition and coaching expertise, and will stimulate an exchange of training techniques across a range of disciplines."

GWYN JONES, the Wales captain, will never play rugby again, even if he makes a full recovery from the spinal injury he suffered during Cardiff's recent match against Swansea in the Welsh League. The 25-year-old Cardiff flanker, who won 13 Wales caps, announced his retirement from the game through his father, Alun, at the Cardiff hospital where he is being treated. Jones was taken to hospital after suffering an injury to his spinal cord which left him without movement in his arms and legs. According to a hospital statement, he was "comfortable" after undergoing surgery, but doctors said that it was too early to give any indication of the progress he was likely to make.

ALL three English teams still battling for Britain in Europe this season will be away in the first leg of their quarter-final encounters. Manchester United will face Monaco in the Champions League Cup on March 4, the return being played two weeks later at Old Trafford. Aston Villa tackle Atletico Madrid on March 3 for a place in the last four of the Uefa Cup and will be hosting the Spanish side two weeks later, while Chelsea, in the Cup Winners' Cup, will also be in Spain on March 3 to meet Real Betis. The return match will be on March 19 at Stamford Bridge.

Football results and tables

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP: Aston Villa 1, Southampton 1; Blackburn 3, West Ham 0; Derby 0, Crystal Palace 0; Leeds 2, Bolton 0; Leicester 0, Everton 1; Liverpool 1, Coventry 0; Newcastle United 0, Manchester United 1; Sheffield Wednesday 1, Chelsea 4; Tottenham 3, Barnsley 0.

NATIONWIDE FOOTBALL LEAGUE:
Division One: Bury 1, Sheffield United 1; Crewe 0, Sunderland 3; Manchester City 2, Middlesbrough 0; Norwich 0, Stoke 0; Nottingham Forest 2, Stockport 1; Port Vale 1 Ipswich 3; Portsmouth 0, Charlton 2; QPR 1, Bradford C 0; Reading 0, Wolves 0; Swindon 1, Birmingham 1; Tranmere 0, Oxford United 2; West Bromwich Albion 0, Huddersfield 2.

Division Two: Blackpool 2, Preston 1; Bournemouth 0, Watford 1; Bristol City 1, Chesterfield 0; Grimsby 1, Carlisle United 0; Luton Town 2, Bristol Rovers 4; Millwall 1, Wycombe 0; Northampton 2, Plymouth 1; Wigan 4, Brentford 0; Wrexham 0, Gillingham 0.

Division Three: Brighton 0, Shrewsbury 0; Darlington 1, Scunthorpe 0; Exeter 3, Rochdale 0; Hartlepool 2, Mansfield 2; Leyton Orient 2, Hull 1; Macclesfield 1, Cardiff 0; Peterborough 5, Lincoln City 1; Swansea 1, Cambridge United 1; Torquay 0, Notts County 2.

BELL'S SCOTTISH LEAGUE:
Premier Division: Celtic 5, Hibernian 0; Dundee United 2, St. Johnstone 1; Hearts 2, Rangers 5; Kilmarnock 1, Aberdeen 0; Motherwell 2, Dunfermline 0.

Division One: Falkirk 2, Airdrie 1; Greenock Morton 1, Stirling Albion 3; Partick 3, Ayr 0; Raith 3, Hamilton 1, St. Mirren 0, Dundee 2.

Division Two: Brechin 1, Stenhousemuir 1; Inverness 2, Forfar 2; Livingston 0, Clyde 2, Queen of the South 2, East Fife 1, Stranraer 0, Clydebank 1

Division Three: Arbroath 3, Albion Rovers 1, Alloa P Ross County P, Cowdenbeath 0, Berwick 2, Dumbarton 0, East Stirling 1; Montrose 1, Queens Park 3
* P = postponed

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd	19	13	4	2	45	13	43
Blackburn	19	11	6	2	36	19	39
Chelsea	19	12	2	5	45	19	38
Leeds	19	10	4	5	28	19	34
Liverpool	18	9	4	5	31	17	31
Arsenal	18	8	6	4	32	21	30
Derby	19	8	5	6	33	27	29
Leicester	19	7	6	6	23	18	27
Newcastle	18	7	5	6	20	22	26
West Ham	19	8	1	10	25	31	25
Wimbledon	18	6	5	7	18	21	23
Aston Villa	19	6	4	9	20	25	22
Crystal Palace	19	5	6	8	17	26	21
Sheff Wed	19	6	3	10	31	43	21
Southampton	19	6	2	11	23	29	20
Coventry	19	4	8	7	17	25	20
Bolton	19	4	8	7	16	29	20
Tottenham	19	5	4	10	17	32	19
Everton	19	4	5	10	17	27	17
Barnsley	19	4	2	13	17	50	14

NATIONWIDE LEAGUE

Division One

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Middlesbrough	23	13	6	4	39	19	45
Nottm Forest	23	13	6	4	37	21	45
Sheff Utd	23	11	9	3	34	22	42
Charlton	23	12	5	6	43	29	41
West Brom	23	12	4	7	25	21	40
Sunderland	22	11	6	5	35	21	39
Swindon	23	11	5	7	32	31	38
Wolverhampton	23	10	6	7	29	26	36
Stockport	23	10	5	8	39	32	35
Bradford	23	8	9	6	22	22	33
Birmingham	23	8	8	7	24	19	32
QPR	23	8	6	9	28	36	30
Norwich	23	8	6	9	23	32	30
Ipswich	22	6	9	7	27	25	27
Stoke	23	7	6	10	24	30	27
Oxford Utd	23	7	5	11	29	33	26
Port Vale	23	7	5	11	26	30	26
Reading	23	6	7	10	21	35	25
Man City	23	6	6	11	26	27	24
Huddersfield	23	6	5	12	24	37	23
Tranmere	22	6	4	12	26	34	22
Bury	23	4	10	9	22	32	22
Crewe	23	6	3	14	26	39	21
Portsmouth	22	5	5	12	26	36	20

Division Two

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Watford	23	16	5	2	38	15	53
Bristol City	23	15	4	4	40	18	49
Oldham	23	9	8	6	37	29	35
Millwall	22	10	5	7	28	24	35
Northampton	23	9	8	6	25	17	35
York	23	9	7	7	31	28	34
Grimsby	22	9	7	6	28	18	34
Chesterfield	23	8	10	5	22	18	34
Blackpool	23	9	5	9	32	36	32
Bristol Rovers	23	8	7	8	31	35	31
Preston	23	9	4	10	29	23	31
Fulham	23	8	7	8	25	25	31
Wrexham	22	7	9	6	27	24	30
Bournemouth	23	7	9	7	24	24	30
Walsall	22	8	6	8	24	25	30
Wigan	22	8	4	10	34	33	28
Gillingham	23	7	7	9	27	32	28
Wycombe	23	6	8	9	30	35	26
Southend	23	7	5	11	27	43	26
Plymouth	23	5	9	9	28	31	24
Brentford	23	5	7	11	24	39	22
Luton	22	5	7	10	23	35	22
Burnley	23	4	8	11	23	34	20
Carlisle	23	5	4	14	26	42	19

Division Three

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Notts County	23	12	8	3	36	23	44
Peterborough	23	11	10	2	44	20	43
Lincoln City	23	11	8	4	25	22	41
Exeter	23	10	8	5	34	25	38
Scarborough	23	11	4	8	36	31	37
Rotherham	23	9	8	6	37	32	35
Barnet	23	10	5	8	34	30	35
Hartlepool	23	7	13	3	33	26	34
Chester	23	10	4	9	33	30	34
Torquay	23	9	7	7	32	32	34
Leyton Orient	23	9	7	7	25	21	34
Macclesfield	22	8	9	5	30	23	33
Scunthorpe	22	9	6	7	29	28	33
Colchester	22	8	6	8	32	31	30
Cambridge Utd	23	6	10	7	31	30	28
Cardiff	22	5	13	4	20	20	28
Shrewsbury	22	7	6	9	32	32	27
Mansfield	23	6	8	9	29	29	26
Rochdale	23	8	2	13	27	29	26
Darlington	22	5	8	9	25	32	23
Hull	23	6	4	13	32	42	22
Swansea	23	6	4	13	23	36	22
Brighton	23	3	8	12	16	30	17
Doncaster	23	1	6	16	16	57	9

BELL'S SCOTTISH LEAGUE

Premier Division

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rangers	18	11	6	1	47	20	39
Celtic	18	12	[illegible]	[illegible]	34	12	38
Hearts	18	12	1	5	39	23	37
Dundee Utd	18	6	6	6	[illegible]	26	24
Kilmarnock	18	6	4	8	17	[illegible]	22
Dunfermline	18	5	6	7	21	34	21
St Johnstone	18	5	5	8	19	20	20
Motherwell	18	5	4	9	23	29	19
Hibernian	18	3	5	10	23	32	14
Aberdeen	18	2	7	9	17	34	13

Division One

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dundee	18	11	5	2	28	8	38
Raith	18	9	4	5	25	16	31
Falkirk	18	9	3	6	27	28	30
Hamilton	17	8	4	5	20	22	28
Airdrie	17	5	8	4	18	21	23
St Mirren	18	6	4	8	21	26	22
Ayr	18	5	4	9	22	26	19
Gr Morton	18	5	4	9	21	27	19
Partick	18	3	7	8	25	32	16
Stirling	18	3	7	8	22	29	16

Division Two

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Clydebank	17	8	8	1	26	13	32
Livingston	17	8	6	3	27	19	30
Clyde	17	6	6	5	24	21	24
Queen of Sth	17	7	3	7	26	27	24
Stranraer	17	5	7	5	26	24	22
Forfar	17	5	6	6	30	33	21
East Fife	17	6	3	8	24	30	21
Stenhsemuir	17	5	5	7	23	28	20
Inverness CT.	17	3	7	7	28	27	16
Brechin	17	3	7	7	20	32	16

Division Three

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arbroath	18	12	2	4	41	21	38
East Stirling	18	11	1	6	30	22	34
Ross County	17	9	4	4	41	23	31
Alloa	16	10	0	6	34	20	30
Queen's Park	18	7	5	6	25	20	26
Albion	17	7	3	7	26	30	24
Berwick	17	6	3	8	24	30	21
Dumbarton	17	4	5	8	25	32	17
Montrose	17	3	4	10	22	44	13
Cowdenbeath	17	3	1	13	9	35	10

Motor Racing

Judge clears all in Senna trial

FRANK WILLIAMS'S grand prix team urged the state prosecutor in the Ayrton Senna manslaughter trial not to challenge the historic verdict which last week absolved the team manager and five other defendants of any responsibility for the Brazilian driver's death.

Their 10-month trial in Imola was the first of its kind. Never before in Europe had Formula One officials and team executives faced the threat of conviction because of a fatal accident.

The decision by Judge Antonio Costanzo was greeted with relief in Italy, where there had been fears of a boycott by Formula One teams. A "not guilty" verdict in WILLIAMS'S case had been expected after the prosecutor, Maurizio Passarini, dropped charges against him.

